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Forty-ninth Session

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President: Mr. Essy (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 95 (continued)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President (*interpretation from French*): I should like to inform the Assembly that in a letter dated 18 October 1994 the Permanent Representative of Canada, on behalf of the Western European and Other States, has requested that the Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of the Holy See during the International Conference on Families.

Members will recall that, in accordance with established practice of the General Assembly, observer non-Member States may normally make statements only in the Main Committees. However, following consultations and taking into account the importance attached to the issues under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision to hear the observer of the Holy See in the course of the International Conference on Families. I take it that there is no objection to this proposal.

It was so decided.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call first on Mr. Michael Woods, Minister for Social Welfare of Ireland.

Mr. Woods (Ireland): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of Ireland.

I would like to congratulate the United Nations on the outstanding success of the International Year of the Family all over the world. The Organization's initiative in devoting these plenary meetings to an International Conference on Families is particularly welcome.

Ireland has always been very committed to the United Nations, of which we have been a member since 1955. Next year marks the fiftieth anniversary of this Organization. Over the years we have made our own contribution, particularly in the area of peace-keeping operations. We have participated in and signed many Conventions, which have helped us to shape our own policies. We have expanded our overseas aid programmes to give greater economic and technical support to developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Yet, for all the progress that has been made worldwide, there is still a great distance to be travelled to a world of justice, equality and respect for the individual. People of all nations still look to the United Nations to help them travel that distance and to meet the challenges that arise on the way.

I know that all who are present here today will warmly welcome the success to date of the process towards achieving a lasting peace in the whole island of Ireland. The announcements last August and just last week of a cessation of violence present us with a great opportunity to break free from the stagnation and demoralization caused by the prolonged violence over the past 25 years in Northern Ireland.

Like South Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, we are coming to grips with resolving our own apparently insoluble problems. In doing so, we can provide a tremendous boost to our national confidence and to our international standing.

This historic breakthrough is particularly timely in this International Year of the Family. Families have been the victims of the heartbreak of the past 25 years of violence in Northern Ireland. I know that all members share our earnest hope that the suffering endured by them has now finally been brought to an end. Families will be the chief beneficiaries of the peace dividend that flows from this peace process.

This International Year of the Family, now coming to a close, has given us an opportunity to highlight the importance of the family as the natural and basic unit of society. That concept of the family was the clear message that came out of a meeting of Ministers Responsible for Family Affairs in the European Union, which I attended last month in Berlin.

Unemployment is the single greatest challenge facing families today. Across Europe some 20 million people are unemployed. Because of our peripheral and demographic situation, our unemployment problem in Ireland is higher than the European average. Some 18 percent of our work force is out of work.

It is a daunting task for any Government to create the right economic climate for employment, one that will meet not only the needs of those currently unemployed but also the hopes and aspirations of a young, emerging work force. This is the challenge facing my Government.

The challenges to family life and the supports needed are issues that must be urgently considered by a developing Europe. The designation by the United Nations of this year as International Year of the Family provides us with the opportunity to address these issues and chart a course for the next millennium. The policies that lead us into the next century must provide supports and progressive options

for parents and children, without distinction. We owe it to our children to do it well.

The tradition of the family has always been one of our strongest national characteristics in Ireland. It is a tradition which has focused on support for parents and their children. It is a tradition endorsed by our own Constitution, which recognizes the family as "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society."

Yet we have never been exclusive in the way we describe the family. Irish society has always recognized the wide-ranging nature of the family unit. This is nowhere more apparent than in the intergenerational relationships within the family. Generations of Irish children have grown up in extended families, with grandparents and elderly relatives living in a caring environment. While families are smaller today, that caring tradition continues, with families increasingly taking an active part in the development of their communities.

Like other European countries, Ireland's strong family tradition is coming under increasing economic and social pressure as we adjust to a fast-moving, more open and rapidly developing European society. Ireland, with a birth-rate of 14.6 per 1000 population, is still among the highest in Europe and one of the few nations with a small, natural increase in population. Almost 50 per cent of the population in Ireland is under the age of 25. Yet the declining trend in population which has been evident in Europe for some time is also developing in Ireland. Almost one fifth of our population is aged 55 or over.

There is a clear need for a new realistic policy and for strategies to strengthen and support the family. In our view, the family is the bedrock of our society, the place where our children find a stable, secure and supportive environment from which to grow and in turn provide a stable and peaceful society.

But families face other challenges, challenges posed by the changes in society itself. The traditional family of breadwinner, spouse and children, while still the most common, is no longer the only family unit. Families are getting smaller - that is evident to us all. The number of lone-parent families is increasing. But there are other changes taking place which require us to widen our perspective on the nature of families. Ageing populations, and an increasing tendency to care for older people in the community, more particularly in their own

homes, have gained recognition for families composed of pensioner and carer.

These changes require a much more flexible approach in the range of supports provided for families in those circumstances. They must encompass not only income maintenance in the event of critical contingencies, such as illness or unemployment, but also tailor-made assistance to address the situation of the family at a particular time in its life cycle. In Ireland, out of a population of 3.6 million, about 800,000 people and their 700,000 dependents rely on social-welfare payments. Families receive additional payments for children, normally up to 18 years of age. Some 250,000 families benefit in this way.

Child income support is a key feature of the Government's commitment to families, with half a million families benefiting from our scheme of Child Benefit. Child Benefit is a universal payment which goes to almost 1 million children, irrespective of the income of the household. Our objective for the future is to develop Child Benefit as the main element of child income support, especially as it is payable to families regardless of their work status. I have recently announced the setting up of a Special Committee to advise me on the future development of our child income supports in the lead-up to our annual budget next January.

We also have support payments for workers bringing up families on low pay, as well as child-related tax-exemption allowances. Back-to-school allowances cover all children in families dependent on social welfare or at work on low pay. One in three school-going children benefit from these allowances. Older people and retired people with dependents receive additional support by way of free travel, special living-alone allowances and assistance with electricity, heating bills and television licenses.

Beginning later this month, we will have our Survivor's Pension extended to widowers on the same terms and conditions as to widows. In this case, both men and women will benefit in the same way from the Survivor's Pension.

The Irish Government is committed to a broad range of institutional, administrative and legislative reforms over the next few years, aimed at strengthening support for the family and, in particular, for women and children. Immediate initiatives include a major programme of family law reform and a referendum on divorce next year. I must mention here that, apart from the right to remarry, we already have divorce on the statute books in Ireland to all

intents and purposes in the form of the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act, 1989.

Civil legal aid and advice provision and the family mediation service are also being strengthened. It is also planned to expand child-care facilities and to provide for adoptive leave for adopting parents. Protection for mothers at work is being strengthened and developed.

Studies in Ireland have shown a strong correlation between long-term unemployment and low educational attainment. The objective of our educational schemes for the unemployed is to provide a second chance for those who, for one reason or another, never completed their formal education. The work we are doing in that area is proving to be particularly successful in helping those people get back into the work force.

The voluntary sector can make an inestimable contribution to the social and economic life of a country. It has a key role in developing the community, in fostering self-help and in empowering people to shape their own futures.

In my own country, we are fortunate to enjoy an active and vibrant voluntary sector. In fact, over half the adults in Ireland are involved with a voluntary organization of one kind or another - that is, one in every two persons is involved in a voluntary organization of one kind or another.

It was for this reason that back in 1990 I initiated the Community Development Programme under the auspices of my Department. Funding is provided on a three-year basis to enable resource centres to get off the ground. Other programmes supporting the voluntary sector include once-off grants for capital projects undertaken by organizations to enhance their capacity and a scheme of grants for locally based women's groups, to be followed this year by a scheme of grants for men's groups. The women were doing most of the work in the community, and I knew that. We had difficulty getting the men involved, but once the women were up and getting these grants, the men very soon came forward and wanted the scheme for themselves. It was the women who really brought them forward in the first instance, but it has certainly revitalized the community involvement in solving problems in their own communities, and particularly the problems of the disadvantaged.

All of these initiatives have been extremely successful in empowering local communities to address the problems they encounter.

Support for the family has been a striking aspect of community development in Ireland. In line with the parameters set by the United Nations in relation to the participation of non-governmental organizations, we have actively supported the development of family resource centres. These centres figure prominently in projects looking for funding, equipment, training in parenting skills and other forms of support. They have developed the confidence of local people. Our experience has been that they can be a catalyst for local development, for enterprise and for jobs. I am convinced that this type of community development is the way forward. It can strengthen the family and provide a focal point for its development within society.

In relation to jobs, the local community will identify many opportunities in the "micro" field. We hear about job creation and about small industries, but when one comes down to the reality on the ground for many local communities one is really talking about micro-industries and micro-businesses. It is micro-businesses in particular that will be fostered by people working in their own communities.

For the future, then, we must preserve, promote, support and develop the strong family tradition that is to be found in Ireland. The Irish Government is committed to those ideals. Families must be central to future policy development in the United Nations and in other major world agencies that chart the course of world economic and social progress. The completion of the International Year of the Family is only the start of a process, which should lead to a framework within which families will be cherished, and their central contribution to the well-being of society acknowledged and supported. Secondly, family-centred policies will ensure that the new world prosperity does not pass them by.

In particular, we need new, inclusive arrangements so that families can benefit fully from the world-wide drive for jobs. The United Nations must instil new urgency in the development of family-friendly policies. Those who are concerned with economic and general social development are very deeply involved in these tasks, but we must not allow them to forget that the basic and fundamental unit of our society is the members of the family who will suffer most if we do not provide them with opportunities, involvement and jobs.

The United Nations, its specialized agencies and national Governments must implement measures to promote economic development so as to ensure that families benefit from the new prosperity. We also need proper support for families with disabled members as those members strive to live and work independently in our society.

Family policy is not just about population control, as we have heard from the recent Cairo Conference; it embraces issues relevant to all family types. If we in the United Nations are concerned about people and their needs - and I know that we are - we must take account of the many different kinds of family members, including mothers, whether at home or at work, elderly people, people with disabilities, carers and those in need of full-time care. We must come forward with policies that are truly family-friendly.

I should like to conclude by sharing with the Assembly a quotation that I came across recently, which captures the essence of what we are trying to achieve at international level. I believe very strongly that it is time we took a very determined position internationally in relation to people with disabilities by giving them the full involvement in society that they so richly deserve. We have the technologies and the knowledge. We must also have the will to ensure that these people are included in the front line of policies. The quotation to which I have referred, which I regard as particularly profound, is as follows:

"If you have come to help me, then you can go back home. But if you see my struggle as part of your own survival, then perhaps we can work together."

Those words were uttered at a conference of people with disabilities. They contain a great lesson for all of us.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on Mr. Gudmundur Arni Stefánsson, Minister of Social Affairs of Iceland, who will speak on behalf of the Nordic countries.

Mr. Stefánsson (Iceland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland - on agenda item 95 relating to the International Conference on Families.

Recognition and acceptance of the variety in family structures in different socio-political and cultural systems

is one of the main goals of the United Nations International Year of the Family. In the Nordic countries, the Year of the Family has inspired considerable debate on the condition of families in modern societies. In those countries the family is perceived as a resource that is important both to individuals and to society. It is the basic unit for social integration and social reproduction. Consequently, much attention has been devoted to assessing the impact of social and economic developments in our societies on family life and on the measures to be taken to prevent the social exclusion of vulnerable families and their individual members.

For several decades our Governments have pursued family welfare policies. These policies, which are well integrated into our general welfare systems, emphasize the protection of children and gender equality.

In times of economic recession it is particularly important, if we are to prevent social exclusion, to pay attention to the vulnerability of children and parents who lack support from local social networks. Society must be able to support families in distress. Tragic instances have demonstrated that an efficiently functioning network of social services is necessary. By such means we have been able to arrange crisis and assistance groups for possible victims and the members of their families.

An important feature of family policy in our countries has been concern about the social conditions of motherhood. Our earliest reforms were to a large extent based on measures intended for mothers - in particular, single mothers.

More recently, changing lifestyles and developments in the labour market have led to a number of reforms. The daily experiences of women and their efforts to reconcile family and work constitute a strong argument for the introduction of special incentives to share parental responsibilities, both in the labour market and in the family.

While paying attention to the relevant experiences of women, we have become increasingly aware of the needs of children. The everyday experiences of children have prompted efforts to enhance measures for preventing their early social exclusion.

Furthermore, focusing on the everyday experience of children has, in turn, led to an increased awareness of the role of the father. Attention is now paid in our countries to the importance of involving fathers in sharing family

functions. This will be one of the major contributions of the International Year of the Family in our countries.

The International Year of the Family has provided us with insight into and understanding of the mechanisms in the complex interplay between societal processes and family dynamics. Our most urgent concerns are to take measures to support parents in reconciling work and family life in a fruitful way and to provide supplementary services and networks for social and educational support, both for parents and children, in local settings.

This is not the occasion to go into details about these measures. However I would like to underline some of the basic principles on which they are based. Public concern with family issues is based on the individual rights of all family members, relying mainly on general measures; highly committed to gender equality and the rights of the child; connected to related labour market policies; strongly committed to the pursuit of social integration for all members of society.

A central feature in Nordic societies, reflecting a move towards equal status for women, is the high rate of women in gainful employment. A tight daily schedule is a reality for many families with children. Reconciliation of work and family life is necessary. This benefits the working family members, the employers and the whole family and thus society in general. Making the working hours of parents of small or disabled children shorter and more flexible is one solution promoted by the Nordic countries. However, other alternative work arrangements should be available to parents. Using these alternatives should not lead to exclusion from the labour market. In reconciling family life and work life it is important that society offer support in the form of sufficient day-care services.

Equality between family members and full enjoyment of human rights is a basic principle in the Nordic countries. This applies not least to children. In this connection, I would like to stress the importance of the ratification and implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Although problems that concern children cannot be solved simply through legislation, legislation does provide the basis for improving the status of the child. The participation of children in decisions regarding their daily lives is being developed in our countries. The rights of

the child are not the exclusive domain of the family. A child has independent civil and social rights. The laws in our countries include, among other things, provisions regarding the responsibility of parents in caring for their children. The law also guarantees the physical safety of children. In this way, parental authority is exercised within the confines of the law.

Domestic violence remains widespread. The protection of family members against domestic violence, particularly women and children, must be guaranteed by law. Yet legislation cannot stand on its own. It is therefore necessary to discuss domestic violence openly in order to influence general attitudes.

Far-reaching economic and social change calls for revitalized and innovative family policies. Through international cooperation we can learn from each other and adopt models that are suitable to our respective countries. The United Nations is an invaluable forum for this learning process.

The United Nations also plays a central role in supporting programmes related to families. Particularly in countries which cannot afford a comprehensive social safety-net, the role of the family still remains crucial. These countries must be supported in their efforts to provide for the care of elderly people and dependent family members by means that respect individual rights of freedom and integrity.

The International Year of the Family is part of a global effort to promote social and economic development in the world. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo made headway in many sectors critical to the family. The World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing next year will give us an opportunity to address a wide range of issues which are closely related to the well-being of the family.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on Her Excellency Senator Rosemary Crowley, Minister for Family Services of Australia.

Senator Crowley (Australia): It gives me very great pleasure to speak about Australia's contribution to the International Year of the Family. We applaud the initiative of the United Nations in proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family.

Australia has embraced the International Year and seized the opportunity to celebrate, reflect upon and support family life in our country.

The United Nations wanted Governments and non-governmental organizations to recognize that their decisions and actions influence how families grow and how well they function as nurturers and providers.

What the Australian Government aimed for, and what I believe it largely achieved, is a new level of commitment to Government policies and programs which are truly family-friendly.

We have celebrated the Year in cooperation with the various spheres of Government in Australia - national, state and local - and with business and the community.

We have recognized that families are as important today as they have ever been. For the most part, they are thriving and making an enormous contribution to society. We have also recognized that there is not just one model of what a successful family looks like.

Australian families are rich in their diversity. The country was home to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thousands of years before white settlement. Within the cultures of these peoples, the family, particularly the extended family, plays a significant role.

Today's Australian population of 17,000,000 includes people from over 130 ethnic backgrounds and over 220 nationalities. Nearly a quarter of our population was born overseas or has a parent who was born overseas.

Each new wave of settlers has brought different forms of family life, and these differences are recognized in our policies of multiculturalism and support for the diversity of the family.

Celebration of the family has an important positive dimension. It helps to remind all of us - including Governments, employers, unions, and community organizations - of the central place in our culture of the family and the need to ensure that our policies and practices nurture, develop and protect the family.

But celebration is not enough.

A large part of this year has been spent listening closely to what our community has to say about families - about the challenges they are facing, and the ways Governments can best assist them.

The Government established a National Council for the International Year of the Family and it was asked to consult as widely as possible with Australians and report back to the Government on its findings. The Council produced a document called "The Heart of the Matter", which is a window on Australian families in 1994. It served as the basis for community consultation.

The Australian community has responded enthusiastically. There were 70 days of consultation covering all parts of Australia, from the dusty outback to our urban centres, and the Council received over 500 submissions. The Council's final report will be presented to the Government by the end of this month. The Australian Government's response to that report and to the Year will be the Australian Government Agenda for Families, a coherent and comprehensive statement of policy and programmes for families into the future. It will address all aspects of national Government activity that relate to families and the impact of all Government policies on families. It will be a blueprint for Australian families well beyond 1994.

Over the past decade, the Australian Government has implemented a broad range of policies to benefit Australian families. The Government has recognized that family policies are not just welfare policies. They are not just about helping families at the margin.

A nation's fundamental economic policies and infrastructure also have a crucial impact on the well-being of families. At that broad level, the Australian Government has achieved much in the past decade to provide families with opportunities to participate equally in the life of the country. The Government has recognized the importance of policies that assist women to participate fully in society. We have implemented a number of programmes to assist women and enacted legislation to outlaw discrimination.

The Government recognizes that most women in their adult lives will spend some time at home, particularly when their children are young, and some time in the paid work force. In this International Year of the Family, we have introduced new payments that support the choice of women and their families.

If families are to function they need to be free of the stress of poverty, have adequate living conditions, especially housing, be able to rely on a stable system of laws and legislation that respect family autonomy while protecting vulnerable members; and have access to supportive services to help them handle the challenges of life.

Family income support - especially for those on low incomes who are caring for children - has been a major focus of the Australian Government since it was elected in 1983.

The Government has introduced targeted payments to help those on very low incomes, whether or not they are in the work force, via the Family Allowance Supplement. Payments have also been integrated to make the system simpler. We have attempted to give the support directly to the carer - usually the mother - and to maximize incentives for work force participation. In its last national budget, the Government also moved to introduce a new parenting allowance which recognizes the importance of this role and extends the choices available to families. The Government has also increased the rate of child payments to low-income families by 78 per cent in real terms.

The Government is currently conducting a major review of all family income payments to assess how they might be improved and made more accessible.

Family law governing family formation and dissolution is also being systematically reviewed. The Australian Government is introducing major changes to our family laws this year. The changes will ease the painful process of dissolution of marriage and raise the status of children. Children will no longer be viewed as objects for custody but, rather, as people who deserve responsible parenting. The new focus on parental responsibilities will, we hope, minimize the damaging trauma when a family breaks down.

These steps complement the recent establishment of the Child Support Agency. This has put in place statutory child support arrangements which make it illegal for non-custodial parents to shirk their responsibilities to provide financially for their children. Each month the Child Support Agency passes on income support to 300,000 children.

Regrettably the family is not always a safe and secure haven. The Government has a range of strategies

to respond to family violence. These include: a national system of supported accommodation for women and families; a national clearing-house for research on violence against women and children; a national community domestic violence education programme to stop violence against women; and a national strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The Australian Government also supports a comprehensive range of family and parental counselling programmes. During the International Year of the Family the Government moved to further improve the pre-marriage counselling skills of civil celebrants so that the excellent programmes offered by the churches were matched for those married by civil ceremony.

The Government has an explicit objective of ensuring that every Australian has access to secure, adequate, appropriate and affordable housing. A particular priority has been to support community housing that maximizes tenants' control over their housing. Home ownership is still desired by most Australians, and since 1992-1993 over 210,000 low-income and moderate-income families with children have obtained housing loans through Government schemes.

The Government is also aware of the stress that poor health can put on families and it has put in place a universal health insurance scheme - Medicare - which guarantees access to high-quality health care for the whole population. There are also special health programmes targeted at the special health needs of indigenous Australians.

Australia has not been spared the consequences of the recent world recession. The Government recognizes that sufficient jobs and a stable economy are crucial to family cohesion and well-being. To this end, it has extended significantly its employment and training programmes. There is a particular focus on the long-term unemployed, access for young people and opportunities for women. This supplements the education programme for our children, which has seen the proportion who reach the final year of high school increase from under 40 per cent to more than double what it was over the last decade.

In 1990 Australia ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 156 to strengthen its commitment to bridging the gap between families and work. One of the most significant contributions of the Government to family well-being, and to helping families combine paid work with parenting responsibilities, is the

expansion of the child-care programme. Since 1983 the number of child-care places supported by the national Government has increased fivefold. The Government is committed now to meeting all work-related demand for child care by the year 2001. The Government also provides financial assistance with fees to keep child care affordable. And to ensure that parents can be confident in the quality of care their children are receiving we have instituted a national accreditation system.

In the industrial sphere laws are being reviewed to help give further effect to ILO Convention 156. The Government has already legislated for a 12-month entitlement to parental leave to be available to all workers and has also legislated expressly to ensure that discrimination on the grounds of family responsibilities is unlawful.

The Government's response to the needs of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is also central to our efforts to help create a mature, tolerant and fair society. Aboriginal peoples and families have historically been among the least advantaged in our community. That is not a situation which the Australian Government and the vast majority of Australian people wish to see continue. Through legislation and through funded programmes we will continue to help this sector of our community to help themselves, and through legislation and funding we will also assist Aboriginal communities to acquire ownership and control of their traditional land in order to help keep communities and families together.

Australia's initiatives for the International Year of the Family are an important part of the social justice agenda we have pursued for over 10 years now. The Australian Government Agenda for Families will build on these initiatives, extend them and, in particular, place the family at the centre of Government policy.

The evidence from a wide range of United Nations bodies, from the Security Council to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), highlights the challenges confronting the world's families. Australia will use the work of the International Year of the Family to set benchmarks against which it can monitor the improvements for families into the next century. My challenge to the United Nations is that it do the same.

The President (interpretation from French): I call next on Mrs. Eveline Hoenigsperger, Director for Family

Affairs, Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family of Austria.

Mrs. Hoenigsperger (Austria): On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family of Austria, which is responsible for the preparation and implementation of the International Year of the Family at the national level, I have the honour to address the General Assembly and present the results of our efforts on this subject.

Austria was among those States which supported Poland's initiative of launching an International Year of the Family at the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly in 1989. Austria's support for this initiative is based on the fact that my country traditionally regards family policy as a priority matter at both the national and the international level.

By international standards Austria maintains a leading role with regard to family allowances and other supportive measures for the family. As a priority issue of Austria's social policy, family policy has been dealt with in a separate "Ministry of Family Affairs" since 1984.

However, much remains to be done. Our efforts have to be continued, increased and improved. New initiatives have to be launched. Therefore, the United Nations initiative to declare an International Year of the Family in 1994 was wholeheartedly welcomed by the Austrian Federal Government as well as by local governments and family organizations.

The Federal Government of Austria entrusted a national committee with the responsibility of preparing and implementing the Year of the Family. The tasks of the National Committee were to develop and to coordinate the activities of the Federal Government, the nine local governments and family organizations. To achieve maximum public awareness and political impact, the National Committee was given a high status. At the same time, the National Committee was asked to seek the integration and participation of non-governmental organizations and family initiatives at the grass-roots level.

The National Committee therefore comprises several levels: the political level, with representatives of the Federal Government and local governments, the cities and communities; the interest groups of employers and employees; and the operational level, represented by the liaison officers of the non-governmental organizations.

The National Committee installed 15 working groups dealing with 15 priority areas of Austrian family policy. Around 700 experts, scientists, politicians, civil servants, members of family organizations and trade unions devoted their experience, expertise and a lot of time to the working groups. This effort initiated the broadest ever discussion process on family policy in Austria.

Apart from the concrete results of the working groups, which will have a strong impact on family policy in Austria at large, the cooperation of individuals of different political and professional backgrounds and experience created a strong integrative effect.

The debate in the working groups of the National Committee emphasized constructive cooperation and finding solution instead of pursuing political aims. This integrative effect of the machinery for the International Year of the Family can be seen as a great success, as it will have a positive influence on the climate for family policy in Austria in the years ahead.

The 15 working groups, which are the cornerstone of the implementation of the International Year of the Family in Austria, deal with the following facets of the phenomenon that we know as the family: family violence, environment, housing, working life, youth, the elderly, family allowances, disability, different forms of living together, difficult living conditions, family law, health, relationship to society, media and education.

It is already evident at this stage that the working groups were able to reveal "blank spots" in Austria's family policy. New concepts and measures, to be put into practice at the political level, will be presented later this year. The results and recommendations of the working groups will make an important contribution to Austria's family policy in the future.

In addition to the conceptual work, the working groups organized, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, a series of conferences and workshops on specific topics, the results of which not only enriched the work of the working groups, but also enhanced public awareness.

Furthermore, based on a recommendation by the working groups of the National Committee, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, together with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research launched a comprehensive family research programme.

In order to involve the local level, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs initiated a competition for projects and ideas which contribute to higher quality of life of the family or to the improvement of the family's problem-solving capacity.

Family organizations organized major events all over Austria, with more than 50,000 families participating. On the International Day of the Family, on 15 May, some 300 family-related events took place in cities and smaller villages. In order to raise public awareness of these events, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs launched an award for journalists focusing on family issues in their work.

Austrian schools were provided with information on the International Year of the Family. Students aged 14 to 18 received a brochure to motivate them to reflect on their families and their role within the family. This initiative can be regarded as a first step towards a family education at school.

Altogether, more than 500 official events were carried out by members of the National Committee, and there was an uncountable number of private initiatives.

Mr. Pallais (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

A first evaluation of the Year's observance at the national level proves that it was possible to achieve a higher awareness of family issues by the public and to enhance the status of family policy at the governmental level. Therefore, we are now confronted with the challenge of making use of the benefits achieved in 1994 to promote a long-term process in which family matters can be pursued as priority policy issues. Attaining this objective will require the support of the following:

First, on the basis of the results achieved by the working groups, a long-term family programme is being elaborated; after endorsement by the Austrian Government, it should form a basis of Austria's family policy at the transition to the next millennium.

Secondly, as an accompanying measure, an Institute of Family Research has recently been established, with the task of carrying out relevant research in support of the decision-making process in the field of family policy.

Thirdly, it is intended to maintain the National Committee on a permanent basis as a national coordinating body on family issues.

Fourthly, involvement and participation at the local level has to be further strengthened. For this purpose, the holding of a session of Parliament with the participation of a number of families is planned for the International Day of the Family in 1995. Depending on the outcome, holding this event on a yearly basis is being considered.

Fifthly, grass-root activities will be continued and further developed, with closer cooperation at the local and community level. A new competition will be launched, which will reward community and family activities devoted to the 1995 United Nations Year for Tolerance.

Sixthly, cooperation with the media will be further developed. Television commercials are in production which aim at increased public awareness of the important role of the family as a social network and of the necessity of appropriate support for the family through society.

The achievement of these aims will undoubtedly depend on the extent of international support for the many national efforts in all the Member States of the United Nations. Therefore, it would be desirable that family issues continue to play an important role within the United Nations. Accordingly, the valuable work carried out by the United Nations in connection with the preparation and implementation of the International Year of the Family should be continued.

In this connection, the declaration of a Decade of the Family as well as the adoption of a long-term family policy programme should be discussed as appropriate steps in the continuation and further development of efforts in family policy at the international level.

Programme of work

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Before calling on the next speaker, I wish to announce that the President of the General Assembly has informed me that action on the draft resolution under agenda item 14, "Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency", will not be taken tomorrow, Wednesday, 19 October, as earlier announced, but rather next week, on a date to be announced in the *Journal*.

Agenda item 95 (continued)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on the representative of Germany, Her Excellency Mrs. Roswitha Verhülsdonk, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Families and Senior Citizens, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mrs. Verhülsdonk (Germany): I have the honour to address the item on the International Conference on Families on behalf of the European Union.

Although the International Year of the Family is not yet over and although many activities related to the Year are still to come, allow me to congratulate the United Nations on the outstanding attention which the International Year of the Family has received all over the world. Our congratulations and our thanks also go to the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, Mr. Sokalski, and his team for the relentless efforts they have undertaken to make the Year a success.

The inventory of national action prepared by the secretariat of the International Year of the Family lists an impressive number of events organized at the local and national levels to achieve the goals of the Year. In many countries, national committees have been set up for the purpose of coordinating these activities. Governments have taken stock of the situation of families in their countries by preparing national reports. Furthermore, the International Year of the Family has initiated important research activities concerning family problems. Everywhere, these activities have stimulated efforts at all levels, both in the public and in the private spheres, to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families. But despite their variety and their specific focus, all the activities undertaken during the Year have a common effect: taken together, they highlight the importance of families, they promote a better understanding of their functions as well as their problems, they further our knowledge of the economic, social and demographic processes and trends affecting families and their individual members, and they focus attention on the rights, status and responsibilities of all family members.

Families today vary in their forms and functions from one country to another, and within each society. This expresses the diversity of individual preferences as well as of societal conditions. Political, economic, social and demographic developments confront families in all societies with serious problems. In Europe, the following elements contribute to the transformation of family forms and structures: increasing numbers of single-parent households, largely headed by women; the later age of first marriages; a decreasing number of children per family; an increasing number of elderly family members; the growing participation of women in the labour market; and changing perceptions of the role of men and women and of the rights of children within the family - to name but a few current trends.

The varying forms of families in different societies notwithstanding, the International Year of the Family, in our view, declared that the family continues to be the basic unit of society and that therefore the family should be accorded the widest possible protection and assistance. Families play an important role in the socialization, education and protection of children and in the intergenerational transmission of culture and values of social conduct, thus deeply influencing the social behaviour of each individual. Hence, families and their individual members should be afforded the necessary protection.

Policies and measures in this field should be guided by the relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for implementing that Declaration, the family-related provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and other United Nations instruments which refer to the family.

Considerable efforts to further the objectives of the International Year of the Family have also been undertaken at the international level. There were very interesting discussions on the issues of the International Year of the Family at the series of regional preparatory meetings and at the World Forum of non-governmental organizations, held in Malta. The United Nations Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, held last year in Valletta, Malta, adopted the Valletta Declaration on the principles, objectives and policy considerations of the

International Year of the Family. We consider a number of the recommendations in that Declaration to be of particular importance even beyond the context of the Year. Allow me to mention just a few of them.

A very important point made in the Declaration is the call to alter conditions of work so as to allow family responsibilities to be taken into account. The European Union attaches great importance to finding flexible and innovative arrangements and to implementing effectively existing laws and regulations governing employment, in order to assist workers to reconcile family life and responsibilities on the one hand and gainful employment on the other. This was one of the issues discussed by European Ministers responsible for family affairs at their informal meeting on 15 September 1994 in Berlin. In addition to the 1992 recommendation on child care the European Union is currently considering measures to improve possibilities for parental leave and part-time work. Furthermore, a family and work network consisting of 12 independent expert consultants has been set up to consider these matters further and to initiate action in the public and private sector.

Furthermore, the Declaration points out that efforts to facilitate the reconciliation of family responsibilities and gainful employment have to build on the recognition that family functions and responsibilities must be equally shared between men and women. A division of parental and domestic functions and participation in paid labour formed simply on the basis of gender, as in the past, runs counter to the fundamental principle of the equal status of men and women. Families will therefore greatly benefit from all policies which aim at a new partnership between men and women. The European Union hopes that the fourth World Conference on Women will make concrete proposals in this regard.

We also share the view that the public policy process at all levels of administration as well as in the private and voluntary sector should develop family-sensitive policies in the fields of housing, work, health, social security and education in order to create an environment supportive of families in their various forms. Appropriate consideration should be given to assisting parents and caregivers and families with special needs, including those having insufficient levels of resources or having members with disabilities or elderly persons to care for. In addition, all measures should reflect an understanding of the different ways in which the needs and situation of families and their members change over the life cycle.

Another element which we find particularly important is the call for all States to take the necessary measures to prevent all forms of violence and abuse within families. Family violence is one of the most insidious forms of violence, particularly against women and children. It is committed in all societies. States have to ensure that laws against family violence and abuse, rape, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence protect the integrity and dignity of women and children. To this end, we urge all Governments that have not yet done so to ratify and implement fully the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Before concluding, I should like to make one additional remark. I mentioned earlier that the form and concept of the family can vary from one State to another. But whatever form it takes in a given country and whatever the religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of its people, the European Union believes that relations within the family must be based on respect for the rights and dignity of each of its members. In this context, we would like to recall the contribution to the International Year of the Family by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women which, in its general recommendation on equality in marriage and family relations, has made specific proposals as to how effect can be given to the articles in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that are of special significance for the status of women in the family.

Looking at the multitude of events, I am convinced that substantial benefits for families can be reaped from the ideas developed during the International Year of the Family. However, this Year has to be seen as an important event within a continuing process. Three major conferences in the next two years, namely the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), will address issues which are of great concern also for families. I hope that they will take into due account what has been achieved during the International Year of the Family.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the representative of the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Mr. Dusan Bella, Director-General of the

Multilateral Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Bella (Slovakia): The Slovak Republic has adopted a complex approach to the International Year of the Family, on both governmental and non-governmental levels.

A particular contribution of the Slovak Government to the International Year of the Family was the launching of a new support programme targeting young families. This coincided with the official visit to Slovakia, on 1 June 1994, of the United Nations Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk Sakolski, who was received by the President, the Prime Minister and other high-ranking officials. During 1994, the Slovak National Council adopted several important bills related to the social and economic welfare of families.

Another concrete activity of the Slovak Government was the establishment of the International Centre of Family Studies (ICFS) in Bratislava in 1993, under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Family and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, the Centre became a focal point not only for national, but also for international activities.

The Centre coordinates a series of research activities at the national and international levels with the aim of assessing the most urgent needs of, and problems related to, the family. As an example, let me mention the international comparative research project: "Possibilities and limits of the family in present-day Europe", or the subregional project (Bratislava - Szeged - Zagreb) on family educational environment. The International Centre for Family Studies has already organized several conferences and workshops with international participation such as, for example: "Ethics in the family and in society", "Families with special problems", "Families in new socio-economic conditions" and "The problems of small countries and their future". The Interregional Meeting of the National Focal Points/Coordinators for IYF, to be held in Bratislava in February 1995, will be the culmination of our activities within the framework of the International Year of the Family.

The International Year of the Family was also an opportunity for a whole range of non-governmental organizations to address family issues through their activities in the educational, cultural, humanitarian, health, population and other fields. The Slovak Catholic Charity opened a new Centre for Family and Education in

Bratislava. Children from the Chernobyl area came to spend their holidays with Slovak families. Abundant cultural events, such as a new cycle of family concerts and an exhibition entitled "Child in the Family", have taken place.

The International Centre of Family Studies has been developing its activities in the challenging environment of the changing socio-economic situation of most families in the region against the background of the ongoing transition and reform process.

The broad activities of this Centre have been appreciated by the United Nations Coordinator for the International Year of the Family. A feasibility study on the possibility of affiliating the Centre with the United Nations, in the sense of General Assembly resolution 47/237, elaborated by a United Nations-mandated expert team, took note "with interest of the proposal by the Government of Slovakia that the Bratislava International Centre of Family Studies be affiliated with the United Nations". Currently, the Slovak Government is putting the final touches to the corresponding draft agreement proposed by the United Nations IYF Coordinator. We would highly appreciate friendly support for the affiliation of the International Centre of Family Studies in the very near future. The Centre, having a very advantageous location in close geographical proximity to the United Nations Office in Vienna, could become a useful basis for the future follow-up activities of the International Year for the Family in the region.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on the Permanent Representative of France, Mr. Jean-Bernard Mérimée.

Mr. Mérimée (France) (*interpretation from French*): On 8 December 1989, the General Assembly, in resolution 44/82, proclaimed 1994 the International Year of the Family, thus reaffirming its desire to give social questions the place that the 1945 Charter had reserved for them; ideological confrontations and the search for social progress solely through economic development had led to their being lost sight of.

Three weeks previously, the General Assembly had adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it was considering holding a world conference on human rights. That was decided the following year, and in 1992 it was decided to convene a World Summit for Social Development. To this important programme one should naturally add the Conference on Population and

Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, two topics to which the General Assembly regularly draws the attention of the international community.

We all realize the amount of work that these global events involve for Member States and the Organization, and yet everyone buckled down to this common task with vigour and determination. Today we are concentrating on the International Year of the Family, but we must place it in the context of our other endeavours.

France viewed this Year as a special time to reflect on the family and policies for the family, taking two facts into account.

The French are profoundly attached to the family - particularly the young people. A recent Government survey of young people aged 15 to 25, which elicited 1.5 million responses, confirmed all previous studies. Young people place the family at the head of their values. Family ties are what enable them to face more calmly a future that often seems to them uncertain and sometimes even frightening.

Our people clearly accept the importance and legitimacy of intervention by the authorities in support of the family. There are four main reasons for that.

First, the role of the family is acknowledged. Article 16(3) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

All French people recognize the validity of this formula, because for them the family has many roles. It is where children learn their rights and their responsibilities; each family member is responsible for the others and watches over the security of the group; natural solidarity is in evidence there, in particular between generations and in favour of the weakest; it is where the common values of our society are passed on; and it is the foundation both of citizenship and of social links. The family is therefore the guarantor of our shared future.

Secondly, individual rights are recognized. No one can doubt that France is committed to the inalienable rights of each individual and that support for families, whatever form that support takes, is provided solely at their option

and with respect for the individual rights of each member. This commitment finds expression in particular through the equality of men and women, the rights of children and the determination of families' way of life.

Thirdly, the need for national solidarity is accepted. Family policies reflect a concern for justice and social equilibrium. The solidarity effort is justified by the collective dimension of the family as an institution which is the origin of the renewal of every society. While it is impossible to define "the family", any family, its foundation has always been a man and a woman determined to face the future together and hoping to create life. This essential function of the family must be protected, and in and of itself deserves the solidarity of the nation.

Fourthly, the role of the State is recognized. Partnership and dialogue between the authorities and the family is a longstanding French tradition, which makes it possible to carry out regularly, at both the provincial and national levels, an in-depth assessment of successes, to analyse shortcomings, examine new approaches and consider implementation of the resulting policies.

Our family policies - I deliberately use the plural - have objectives that are constantly adapted to changes in society: allow parents to realize their family plans and thus encourage births; ensure "horizontal" redistribution to compensate for the cost of bringing up children; or ensure "vertical" redistribution, favouring families with the lowest incomes?

In fact, the French Government is jointly pursuing all three objectives within the framework of a comprehensive policy taking account of the aspirations and needs of families of all kinds, because families are at the heart of most public policies.

The International Year of the Family has been an important time for France.

First, as soon as his Government took office in 1993, The Prime Minister, Mr. Edouard Balladur, started work on a five-year law in support of the family, and it was adopted on 25 July 1994. The main provisions of the law, which improves even further our family support measures are:

Extension of the parental education grant paid to a parent who ceases professional activity to devote himself or herself to the education of an

infant under 3 years. It now goes into effect as of the second child and can be paid if part-time work is involved. If both parents work part-time, two allowances can be paid. From now on, all wage-earners will be guaranteed their job back - or an equivalent job - when parental leave comes to an end.

Training of child-care personnel, working with young children, either individually or in groups;

Improving the right to leave for family reasons;

New measures to support families with young adults to look after or where there have been multiple births or adoption;

Finally, progressive increases in pensions for widows and widowers.

Secondly, we have begun a major national dialogue. The work done by the national Steering Committee of the International Year of the Family and the ensuing action will be described in an official report to be presented on 18 December by the National Coordinator to Mrs. Simone Veil, Secretary of State, Minister for Social Affairs, Health and Urban Development. It will be widely distributed in France and will also be sent to our foreign counterparts and to the Coordinator of the International Year in Vienna. A document summarizing the International Year's progress in France has been made available to delegations today.

In its resolution 47/237 the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit next year specific proposals on the follow-up for the year. An interregional meeting, to be held in Bratislava from 4 to 7 February 1995, will deal with this question.

I have stressed the importance and the interrelationship of our various activities. The World Summit for Social Development and the Beijing Conference will undoubtedly in their turn contribute substantively to our undertaking.

In speaking at length at the beginning of my statement about the basis of family policy in France, I was thinking of the follow-up to the Year. It must respect the following simple principles: recognition of the role of the family; respect for individual rights, including the rights of women; free choice of family lifestyles; support for and protection of the family by society and the State; and partnership with families and their representatives.

Our Assembly has proclaimed 1995 United Nations Year for Tolerance. Tolerance is a noble, vital concept when applied to the family, because it belongs above all in the private domain. While the authorities must show judgement, because families - let us be honest - can also be places of oppression and violence, we must accept differences when they accord with the major principles underlying the legitimacy of our Organization.

Because it is in the family that we place our hopes in the struggle against the rise of individualism, which threatens our societies, we must all make sure that we protect our families. While the follow-up to the Year must naturally be carried out first - and principally - at the national level, our Organization can help by proposing a joint consideration of principles, objectives and methods.

France is resolved to take part in this future work, as it should enable all societies to enter the twenty-first century with a more hopeful outlook.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Mr. Razali Ismail, on whom I now call.

Mr. Razali (Malaysia): The Malaysian delegation welcomes the declaration of 1994, in recognition of the critical role of the family, as the International Year of the Family. Since 1990 the Malaysian Government has declared 11 November each year Malaysian National Family Day. But taking into account that this is the year the United Nations has designated Year of the Family, the Malaysian Government has agreed to celebrate its National Family Day on 15 May instead of 11 November. In order to observe this important occasion, the Malaysian Government has allocated a budget of about \$1 million to finance relevant activities. The activities themselves combine activities of Malaysian National Family Day and those suggested by the United Nations for the International Year of the Family.

The marginalization of the family institution is a serious problem requiring the attention of all societies, in developed as well as developing countries. The pressures exerted on the family are tremendous. The social problems of development, poverty, joblessness and crime, as well as the competing and contradictory pressures that bear down on the individual and the family unit, have contributed to the impairment of the ability of the family institution to perform its functions. We should collectively recognize and address these problems. While

nowadays one may stress the rights and ability of the individual, my delegation believes that it would be wrong to do so at the cost of the attrition of the family as an entity. The individual and the family actually reinforce each other: individual rights complement consensual needs. We see the breakdown of this premise as a contributory factor leading towards serious polarization and challenges to societies, as can be seen in both developing and developed countries.

The incidence of street children, child labour, child prostitution, substance abuse and crimes committed by young people is symptomatic of the breakdown of the family institution, attributable in the main to poverty and unemployment. The threat posed by criminal activities to any society should not be downplayed or underestimated. They have the potential to become a major destabilizing factor in the body politic of States, as well as for the international community.

The family is the building block of society. The role of the family in ensuring that human beings will enjoy a productive life in a secure and safe environment, in harmony with nature, is paramount. The family remains the most natural emotional, economic and security support for each and every individual. For us in Malaysia, as in other places, the family is at the heart of an extended human relationship that must survive the process of our development and evolution and not be its casualty. Many societies long ago lost the ability to recognize and further nurture the family as the confluence of reconciliation, healing and motivation. We regret that this has come about and that in some societies there is a sense of being adrift.

The experience that one goes through in everyday family life will shape one's character, attitude, demeanour, moral persuasion and various other human traits that ultimately condition the way one interacts with the social and physical environment. The vital functions of the family include the upbringing of the young, through both formal and informal education. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that the young traditionally learn most from their families.

The role of a family is not confined merely to the upbringing of the young. The family remains central in taking care of the elderly as well. In fact, world-wide, Governments are expected to face a serious problem pertaining to the care of the elderly, especially the poor, the frail and the destitute. The family has an instrumental role to play in reducing the burden of the State in the care of the family. This ancient family role must be preserved

and promoted. This will contribute to the strengthening of the family as an institution.

There are numerous measures that we can take, individually and collectively, to strengthen the institution of the family. Nationally, Governments should look seriously into implementing agreements reached at various international conferences, such as the recently concluded International Conference on Population and Development. Issues relating to family violence, child abuse, child care, care of the disabled and the elderly, education, health care, the care of orphans, housing and basic amenities are closely linked to the integrity of the family institution, and they need to be addressed in that context.

Many pressures felt by families today, including the high cost of education, health care and basic amenities, are the result of unbridled and unsustainable development. These problems often have severe negative repercussions on families. Governments therefore have a moral obligation and a social responsibility to intervene and ensure that the basic necessities remain within the reach of ordinary people.

In dealing with the issue of the family, we have to address squarely the status and role of women. In many societies women have been the unacknowledged pillars of the family. Emotionally and physically, they provide succour and sustenance to the family, and in many cases they are the breadwinners as well. Society has to come to grips with the problems of women by devising institutional means to alleviate their burden, which will consequently enhance the integrity of the family.

Like others, we remain concerned over the increasing incidence of women as single parents. The hardship and, indeed, the misery of these women must be acknowledged and alleviated through the provision of legal and financial support so that these families will continue to survive. An essential feature of support for women must have, as its central focus, education. The education of women is one way to enhance their status to ensure that they can react to changing socio-economic situations and be aware of the full extent of their rights and role within society.

The international community will have the opportunity to address again the issue of strengthening the family institution at the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development. The issues which form the core interest of the Summit - namely, poverty, employment

and social integration - are directly related to the important role and function of the family. Poverty and unemployment often cripple the ability of families in producing healthy, balanced individuals.

The United Nations, through such agencies as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, has been instrumental in helping developing countries to provide essential services to the people, thereby indirectly supporting the family structure. These agencies must continue to do so. In fact, their activities must increase. To enable an increase in these activities, it is imperative that they have the resources. Donor countries should in fact increase their contributions to fund these agencies, rather than reducing their contributions as current trends would seem to indicate.

My delegation also believes that non-governmental organizations have a major role to play in alleviating the pressures on families. Together with Governments and the local people, non-governmental organizations can play an important role in maintaining and, where possible, strengthening the role of families. This is particularly important for non-governmental organizations from the South, which must work together with Governments to improve the lot of the people. There is wide and ample scope for constructive interaction and engagement.

In conclusion, as mankind proceeds inexorably to improve its standard and quality of life, it goes without saying that the process must ensure the integrity and relevance of the family. The well-being of the family is the bedrock of the international community as well.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on The Honourable Mr. Antonio Guidi, Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity of Italy.

Mr. Guidi (Italy) (*spoke in Italian; English text furnished by the delegation*): Let me begin by thanking the United Nations and the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk Sakolski for organizing this International Conference on the Family. While fully supporting the statement made by my German colleague on behalf of the European Union, I should like to add my country's reflections on the crucial issue of the family.

Anyone who has had prolonged professional contact with disability is well-acquainted with the phenomenon of those who either isolate themselves or become stubborn.

I may not have great or original ideas but I am certainly stubborn, and with stubbornness I will reconsider in my statement certain terms that are used and abused. To have any impact on reality, they require continued use as well as effort on the part of both the speaker and the listener.

At the moment of making a decision, I often remember a motto I read years ago in the margins of a letter from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities: "Today's choices for tomorrow's world." This reminds me of the great responsibility we all assume each day in working for the sake of future generations. Whoever wrote that motto in 1969 showed an awareness and foresight that has grown more relevant through time. Unfortunately, all too few people have made this intuition their own over the years.

I believe that the United Nations showed the same awareness and foresight in proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family. This is the same year as the Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the preparations for next year's Beijing Conference on Women. In both Conferences, the central role of the family emerges as a reality at the crossroads of all the problems of modern society.

The Cairo Conference reaffirmed the family as the natural and fundamental nucleus of society, with the right to be protected by society and the State, as postulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It then showed the world how the family - in the many forms reflecting the various social, cultural and political systems in which it exists and develops - is currently going through a period of serious moral and material hardship. And the first people to be penalized by this hardship are children, the elderly and women, which can be three extremely vulnerable categories in the current social context.

The child, as the United Nations Children's Fund often points out, is the subject most affected by society's shortcomings. In poor societies, imbalances in demographics and resources are created that generate severe hardships affecting a child's expectations of life, such as education, health and even dreams. Even in advanced economies, children are often penalized and forced to make serious sacrifices, such as a significant reduction in their living space, less and less time from the adult and, in extreme cases, the loss of one parent.

It is my hope, and the social struggles of my country are testimony to the fact, that in planning and making laws on children, we operate no longer from the adult's perspective but from the minor's. I ask this Assembly to reflect on the conditions of children who live in war zones. In the past 10 years, 1.5 million children have lost their lives in armed conflicts; 4 million have remained disabled; 5 million are refugees; and 12 million have been uprooted from their home communities.

This list of facts shows us the dimensions of a phenomenon that I consider both terrifying and unworthy of a civil humanity, a humanity that should be a "parent", as the Pope said on the International Day of Families, quoting Genesis:

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. In this union they transmit life to new human beings: they become parents. In this way they take part in the creative power."

In 1990, at the World Summit for Children, 150 Governments signed a Declaration that guaranteed respect for truces and special relief corridors for children in violent, war-torn lands. These concepts were raised and broadened by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which also contains the proclamation of the right of all children to basic health care, food and education.

I hope that in the current year Governments that have not yet signed the Declaration will do so, thereby allowing for its full application.

But the *niños de rua* - the *little slaves* - of some zones in Asia are also fighting a daily war. This is a war that consists of daily shortages and continuous abuses of power, and it is far from over. Unfortunately, it is now being extended to economically advanced countries that were considered immune. It too requires the drafting of an international treaty: How much is the life of a child worth?

Cairo conjugated development in the feminine, as I said there. But women, whom the Egyptian President Mubarak called "the cornerstone of our society", represent the second vulnerable element within the family. Since it is within our power, it is our duty to guarantee women certain rights, namely education and health care.

One fundamental point of reference is the issue of equal opportunity for men and women. Today, in many countries and situations, the roles within the family and the

society are too rigid. It is thus necessary to appreciate a woman's work in the family and even consider the possibility of paying her a salary; at the same time, it is indispensable to facilitate her entry into the work world and protect her from every type of social discrimination. The Government Commission for Equal Opportunity established in Italy is working from this perspective.

I hope that the participants in the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing can reach a general consensus on these principles and draft precise recommendations on the condition of women.

What do we do for the elderly? I am referring to all those who, having reached what their society considers an advanced age, are unjustly relegated to the sidelines. The main problems regarding the elderly can be summarized under four headings: quality of life, health services, guarantee of employment for as long as the individual can or wishes to work, and integration into the family. Taking care of the elderly is a duty towards those who in the recent past bore the weight of our society on their shoulders. But it also and specifically meets the challenge of civility.

Thus, in part through the creation of a system of social support, we must restore the elderly to a central position within the family framework. This would enrich young people by teaching them to appreciate those who by their example, dignity, experience and culture can provide certainty in the present and guidance in the future. And if an elderly person has no family, or has a family that cannot maintain him or her within its nucleus, the State must shoulder the responsibility for the creation of small structures that interact with the territory and the population.

In Italy, we have recently witnessed a significant demographic drop caused by a tangible decrease in births. This culminated in 1993 with fewer births than deaths. I believe that the low birth rate is caused in part by the employment problem: Italy is one of the countries with the longest waiting period between the end of a person's studies and the beginning of his or her work activity. Another reason is the difficulty in finding housing and the scarce economic opportunities. There are also reasons that are not material, such as little faith in the future, lack of control over one's immediate situation, and the current trend of young couples' regarding a child as a curb on their freedom.

My goal has always been to make people understand that a child represents the best investment for the future. To this end, with full respect for the individual's right to choose whether or not to have a child, I feel it is indispensable to implement a series of tax breaks for a person who decides to have one.

One phenomenon of great current interest is the increasing number of families with one parent and one child. This particular reality is very difficult for both the adult, who is often exposed and alone, and the child, who is the focus of all the adult's affection. The child cannot share this affection with other children in a society that tends to separate individuals, or with brothers and sisters, or with the other parent.

Allow me to refer to what I regard as the ideal family, even it is difficult to put together. I call it the "long" family. It can respond to the many needs of a growing child through the daily commitment of the couple and the precious support of the elderly - I do not wish to be nostalgic but to look towards a possible future. This family must treat, prevent, and settle social hardships - a trustee of the highly delicate task of educating minors and protecting the elderly and the disabled.

The "long" family can in fact help solve the emergency of solitude: the solitude of the elderly person, who is ever more marginalized, and of the child, who is listened to less and less. Such a family can give voice to children and space to the elderly, demonstrating that the solution to this shared emergency can simply be to bring both age groups together again.

Today, thanks to technology, but thanks especially to an increasing awareness, the erroneous conviction that the disabled cannot compete in social life is changing. Although this has allowed the less severely disabled to be integrated into society and to express their potential, it has not given everyone the same opportunity. In fact, at this moment in the world there are millions and millions of prisoners. They are not victims of unjust regimes or of wars. They are the severely handicapped, prisoners of themselves and of their homes and of their cities. Part of the reason I am here today is to ask Governments to make it a priority to act on behalf of these people and at the same time to recognize them as a social resource of humanity.

The problem of reuniting the families of immigrants leads inevitably to what emerged in Cairo as one of the

main problems facing humanity in the near future, namely, immigration.

The solution to this problem must be sought in a transnational framework, through a gradual rebalancing of individual national economies and in full respect for the social and cultural independence of populations. Immigration will cease to be a problem only on the day when each State can guarantee acceptable living conditions to the citizens within its borders.

I think that it is unacceptable today to talk about "us" and "them", to distinguish between the various populations that inhabit the Earth. The foreigner must be treated as a friend and, as such, as a possible resource for the host country. Until this happens, one of the problems posed by immigration will be the reuniting of families, which is a fair expectation and a right for the millions of emigrants who honestly pursue the dream of bettering their conditions of life by working in a foreign land.

In Italy we have adopted measures to create a system of rights and duties that respect human dignity. These measures are designed to pursue and punish the minority of immigrants who live outside the law and at the same time to guarantee a better standard of living to others. This can be done in part through the utilization of social services, the acquisition of civil rights and the possibility of reuniting their families.

Going back to what I said in Cairo, I propose the inclusion of immigration-related issues in the agenda of the next meeting of the G-7, in Canada. At the same time I propose, as I did then, the organization of a world conference on the issue.

I would also like to renew the proposal I made for a conference on volunteerism, to be organized by Italy and to be held in the near future.

It is my conviction that volunteerism should be understood as a strong, founding value of a civil and unselfish society. It should be praised as a model for overcoming hardship in a population otherwise lacking in ideological points of reference. Volunteerism is also a response to shortcomings in the public sector and plays a role, for example, in the creation of very important centres for drug addicts, the handicapped and abandoned children. We must thus work to appreciate these functions and restore equal dignity to these systems, which must not be alternatives to public systems.

Volunteerism is true treasure, and it will constitute one of the fundamental values of the year 2000.

I feel great sadness when I realize that people today no longer dream the impossible dream. But I am glad that they seek instead a justice with human dimensions, an end to violence and the fulfilment of primary needs - all rights that should be concrete, natural and universal.

In this context I give great importance to the proclamation of 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance. Through a series of initiatives like those for the Year of the Family, which is officially concluding today, that Year will prompt a series of reflections by Governments and mankind on the true values on which to base the future development of our society and individual life. The first of these is solidarity.

My hope as Italy's Minister for the Family is that in the near future, through solidarity, old and new self-interests and ethnic, social and religious hatred can be overcome to achieve that superior good to which we aspire, namely, peace.

Whoever looks at reality without truly seeing it cannot understand. A child, a person in trouble or a small unfamiliar group of people may look like imperfect, discolored and useless pebbles in such a person's eyes. If we step back, however, broadening our perspective and adjusting our vision, we realize that these little pebbles make up a fascinating mosaic. Each of them has the right to exist, to be a part of that tormented, splendid, contradictory mosaic of humanity. Here, in this forum, where all voices are heard, it must come together and be seen in its totality. Each one must have a role and be heard. We will no longer need someone to speak for another and another to hear. No later than tomorrow - or even today - we must enter into a mode of communication in which we will all have equal dignity of voice, tone and role.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on Mr. Win Mra, Permanent Representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): With its adoption of resolution 44/82 of 8 December 1989, the General Assembly proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family. This proclamation is important in that, by making it, the United Nations was for the first time drawing the attention of the international community to the special needs and importance of the family. The resolution reaffirmed the

importance of the family as the most basic unit of society. It also reawakened the international community to the role of the family in contemporary society and to the challenges it faces as a result of political, economic and social changes. This is the most fitting occasion to examine the challenges brought about by these changes and to formulate appropriate strategies.

Since the proclamation, we have seen the smooth implementation of a well coordinated and effective preparatory process. We can say with a sense of satisfaction that the preparatory process has succeeded in promoting the objectives of the Year and has resulted in crystallization of the substantive concerns regarding families. Consequently, we find ourselves today poised to embark on follow-up activities.

One of the principles underlying the International Year of the Family is the need to undertake the activities of the Year at all levels - local, national, regional and international, with the primary focus at the local and national levels. Only with sustained effort at these two levels can the family regain its pivotal role in ensuring the well-being of society. Today is the most opportune time to take stock of activities at the national level.

In the Union of Myanmar many activities were undertaken during the preparatory stage - activities such as organizing child-development centres; holding contests for children and giving prizes to the winners; and arranging ceremonies for cash donations towards observance of the International Day of Families. Arrangements to coordinate departments' observance of the International Day of the Family were made in April 1994. Non-governmental organizations were invited to take part, in accordance with the objectives of the International Year of the Family. The theme and the motto of the Year were translated into the Myanmar language, and both the English and the Myanmar versions were published in local newspapers. All activities were broadcast by Myanmar Television, beginning on 12 May 1994.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/237, the International Day of Families was observed in Myanmar on 15 May 1994 under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. A special ceremony was held to observe the Day, at which the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement gave an account of the principles and objectives of the International Year of the Family. Those attending included officials of the World Health Organization, the

United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund; heads of departments and enterprises; representatives of the Women's Sports Federation, the Myanmar Red Cross Society, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, the Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association and the Union Solidarity and Development Association; and members of the Red Cross Brigade.

The highlights of the ceremony were the reading of the message sent by the United Nations on the occasion of the International Day of Families; presentations by the President of the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association and the Chairman of the Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association on the International Year of the Family; and the presentation of prizes to the winners of the children's painting contests that had been held earlier. A commemorative theme song composed for the Year was also broadcast by Myanmar television on 15 May 1994.

In Myanmar the family is traditionally a close-knit social unit. It usually consists of three generations of the family living under one roof - children, parents and grandparents. In addition, the predominant religion, culture and traditions of the land require that the family remain a cohesive unit for the development of the children and for their nurturing through proper upbringing.

While caring for its other dependants, the family is mainly responsible for the growth and development of its most vulnerable members - infants and children. The Myanmar family structure is conducive to this role. Children are the object and focus of parental and grandparental love. By tradition and culture, as well as by law, the rights of the child are conscientiously and scrupulously respected. Myanmar has always had legislation to protect children - for example, the Young Offenders Act 1930 and the Children Act 1955.

On 16 July 1991 Myanmar acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a State party, Myanmar has accepted a formal obligation to recognize and protect the broad range of rights provided for in the Convention. On 14 July 1993 Myanmar enacted new legislation on children and repealed obsolete laws.

The aims of the new legislation are as follows: to implement the rights of the child as recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; to protect the rights of the child; to ensure that children may fully enjoy their rights under the law; to make provision for protection of the best interests of the child, taking into

account the financial resources of the State; to ensure that the custody and care of children in need of protection and care may be undertaken by the State or by voluntary social workers or non-governmental organizations; and to make provision for the separate trial of juvenile offenders and for the reform of children who have committed offences.

Under the new legislation, a child in the custody of a cruel or wicked parent or guardian is defined as being in need of protection and care, and the State is required to intervene to protect the rights of such a child.

The Myanmar Government's multifaceted measures to ensure the nation's development have resulted in an expansion of social services. This is the outcome of innovative social policies that address the needs of families. These social services are being provided, not only by the Government, but also by non-governmental organizations.

The roles and functions of the family have changed, principally as a result of economic modernization and of moral degradation and its concomitant circumstances. However, the fundamental character of the family as the natural framework for providing its individual members with emotional, financial and material support remains largely unaffected. How to safeguard this basic character against the onslaught of contemporary pressures is the challenge with which the international community is now confronted.

In developing countries, where formal social security systems are inadequate - indeed, in some cases such systems do not exist - the family and the community are the two entities that can provide individual social security. It is therefore important for the developing countries to maintain and strengthen the existing family structures and to promote the community spirit until such time as the State can afford an adequate and sustainable social security system. My delegation believes that this is an area in which the international community could complement efforts at the national level.

For their part, the developing countries should have as components of their social policies plans and programmes to uphold the traditional values that underpin the cohesiveness of the family. Mutual respect, understanding, consideration and tolerance should be nurtured and upheld at schools. Any future strategy must encourage the instillation of these time-tested values.

Mr. Abdellah (Tunisia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The International Year of the Family is one event within a continuous process and accordingly its observance should not be an end in itself. It should constitute an important starting-point in a long-term process. It will be pointless unless the proclamation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family and all the activities which the international community has relentlessly undertaken from the preparatory phase to the present lead to well-conceived strategies beneficial to families. In drawing up these strategies, jettisoning of the obsolete concepts should be balanced with the maintenance of the concepts and family models that still tend to contribute to the strengthening of the family as a basic unit of society. My delegation fully supports the Secretary-General's plans to have appropriate follow-up strategies ready for timely submission to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on Mr. Juan Carlos Mato, Director-General for the Legal Protection of Minors, Ministry of Social Affairs of Spain.

Mr. Mato (Spain) (*interpretation from Spanish*): While fully supporting the statement made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union, I should like to add to his statement a few general assessments and views which we, from the Spanish standpoint, deem worthy of pointing out in the framework of this debate, appropriately taking place in the General Assembly.

The celebration of the International Year of the Family does credit to the United Nations, in particular if we assess the impact the Year has had on the international community, especially at the region, national and local levels. A decisive contribution was made during the preparatory process by the Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, Mr. Sokalski. Special mention should also be made of the considerable work carried out by the various committees of the non-governmental organizations on the family, in particular the work of the Vienna Committee for the preparation of the World Non-Governmental Organization Forum, held in Valletta, and other activities of particular importance.

The conclusions of the regional preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family for the countries of Europe and North America, as well as General Assembly resolution 47/237, continue to be points of

reference for seeking common ground among various approaches to the family, its role in the society at the end of the century, the public policies involved, and the role to be played by non-governmental organizations.

As we near the year 2000, the family continues to be seen as the basic unit of society in light of the key functions it plays at the heart of inter-generational solidarity, and as the emotional, economic and material support its members need for their proper growth and development.

The family as an entity cannot be said *a priori* to be "finished" in a more or less defined way, nor do its functions appear to have been established once and for all. On the contrary, it is seen as a constantly evolving, multifaceted and dynamic reality, a producer of changes but also affected by those changes. It is a social framework whose role and functions cannot be seen as exclusively private units, but rather as public units in constant interaction with demographic, cultural, political, legal and economic phenomena.

A clear recognition of the important social and economic functions of the family has made us increasingly aware of the effects changes in social structure and in economic activity have had on the nature of what we today call a family, at times changing the ties and links which bind its members and even reducing the family's capacity to satisfy basic needs. These changes have opened our eyes to the existence of many different kinds of family units. That is why in our policies having to do with the family, we should attempt to avoid an explicit or implicit promotion of a single ideal picture of the family, and avoid basing these policies exclusively on stereotypes and models of the family that do not reflect existing realities as a whole.

From sociological data, we can conclude that the institution of the family plays a central role in the renewed Spanish society at the end of this century. Family life has received very high marks in surveys on well-being. What is most interesting is the fact that these well-being indicators are independent of other social variables such as schooling, income and social class.

Undoubtedly the family is the first educational environment in which an active and prolonged process of socialization, learning and transfer of culture takes place. Within the family, one can begin to promote true equality of opportunity for girls and boys to have access to culture, knowledge and democratic values.

The society and the State must provide the necessary environment and resources for families to exercise this basic responsibility, while themselves fulfilling their own responsibilities by ensuring universal, accessible, quality education and thus promoting equal access to opportunities. This, moreover, involves educational policies aimed at ensuring the effective participation of families, children and teenagers in the educational community.

Similar measures are also required for the protection and promotion of mothers in such areas as labour law and health policy, to make mother-child health services, family planning, and early detection and treatment for the disabled universally available and accessible.

Equality between men and women in the decision-making process, an equitable sharing of family tasks and responsibilities at home, as well as the effective achievement of democracy and equality in the public sphere, are closely linked to the process of promoting the individuality and autonomy of women. The driving force for change in the role played by women in our societies has been the involvement of women in the work place. This has been an essential element in the development of society, as was made clear at the Conference on Population and Development.

Therefore, meeting the new challenges of the modern family requires promoting all of its members through public policies which will facilitate, among other things, a balance between family and work life.

Establishing individual needs and those of the family as a group in organizing daily family life will guarantee that families can function. It is the basis for sustaining a new social covenant in the private sector, a covenant between men and women, between children and adults, between the elders and the other members of the family - a family covenant.

The International Year of the Family is serving as a platform for the development of a wide-ranging discussion in Spanish society and in Spanish institutions of the new role that the family has in these times, on demographic factors, on relations between the individual, the family and society, and on legislation that affects families.

The Spanish Parliament has never had such intensive and important work to do as it has this year on policies affecting families and on the control to be exercised by the Government in this area. A parliamentary working group on family policy has been set up. Experts, non-

governmental organizations and political heads of ministries that have the most to do with family policies have appeared before that working group. The results of this work will be reflected in requests by the Congress to the Government.

The Senate has requested the Government to establish an inter-ministerial working group to draft a report on the situation of one-parent families in Spain and draw up proposals to improve the most difficult social situations. Furthermore, the Government is setting in motion a range of family-policy measures, some of which I have already referred to. Similarly, progress has been made in some autonomous and local administrations.

Moreover, in connection with the celebration of the International Year of the Family, a National Committee has been set up in which experts, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the Central Administration, autonomous communities and local administrations are participating.

As regards substantive commitments, in the light of the purposes and principles which the United Nations has proposed for the International Year of the Family, we have drafted a Plan of Action which includes the contributions of the members of the National Committee. This Plan establishes the goals of campaigns to promote communications, awareness and exchanges of information during the International Year of the Family which have been developed in Spain.

The International Year has already left a legacy for our families, our societies, our public administrations and our non-governmental organizations. It has been an opportunity for non-governmental organizations to be more visible in our societies and for Governments to take a more active interest in the needs and expectations of families.

The activities connected with the International Year of the Family should be appropriately reflected in the activities of the United Nations, and should be in keeping with the important role families play in our societies. In any event, one line of future strategy will be the inclusion of the family perspective in activities carried out by the bodies and agencies of the United Nations system. In this approach, the personal and social development of all the members of the family should be taken into account.

We firmly support the decision by the United Nations inter-agency meeting that the slogan of the

celebration in 1995 of the International Day of Families should be: "Tolerance Begins in the Family".

Finally, in drawing activities complementing the International Year we should take into account the reports that will be made at the focal-point meeting of the International Year of the Family in Bratislava at the beginning of next year, the statements on the family made at the International Conference on Population and Development, and the results that may emerge from the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The results of these international meetings will be of extreme importance in highlighting the importance of the family at the end of this decade, as we look to the future. However, of equal importance is our resolve to make progress at the regional, national and local levels in improving the status and promoting the quality of life of the family in our societies.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on the representative of Canada, Ms. Nancy Kilgour Carr, Federal Coordinator for the International Year of the Family.

Ms. Kilgour Carr (Canada): Canada is proud to say that it has taken an active role in celebrating the International Year of the Family. In our country, international years have often been milestones in the development of public policy and social action. However, to achieve that impact they must belong to Canadian society as a whole - its governments, institutions and communities. Only that can create the broadly based effort needed to focus attention on the issues that define the Year and the progress we can make as a people.

That inclusive approach has been the policy of the Government of Canada to the International Year of the Family. Canada is a large and diverse land. At a governmental level we are a federation in which all provinces, territories and municipalities have programmes, services and policies that affect families. After all, Canada is made up of millions of different families. All these factors underline the value of reaching out to enlist wide support for the International Year of the Family.

Since the decision of the General Assembly to designate 1994 as the International Year of the Family, Canada has taken action on many fronts. Our international commitment has taken forms such as the decision to fund

a staff person at the International Year of the Family secretariat in Vienna for a three-year period.

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of families and is committed to providing a variety of programmes to support and enhance the well-being of families. The federal presence in the International Year of the Family is the Federal Secretariat for the International Year of the Family. It coordinates and promotes International Year of the Family activities and initiatives across federal departments and agencies - for example, public awareness, research, and working in partnership with other levels of government and non-governmental organizations - all for the betterment of families. A major component of the Secretariat's strategy has been participation in major family-related conferences, such as the one held in Victoria, British Columbia, on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under the theme "Stronger Children - Stronger Families", 800 international delegates were drawn from all sectors of society to discuss issues arising from the Convention. They looked at the needs of children in situations of emergency, basic health and welfare needs, children and youth with disabilities, and a host of other issues.

In addition to the federal government's work, individual provinces and territories have formed groups or assigned staff to promote International Year of the Family activities within their own jurisdictions.

The leading non-governmental organization has been the Canada Committee for the International Year of the Family. The federal government provided funds to establish this independent, non-governmental organization in 1992. It has a board of directors made up of 32 distinguished Canadians. Since its creation, it has been active in forming partnerships with other non-governmental organizations and business, labour and community organizations.

I could cite many examples of the Committee's work, particularly through its partnership with other family-related non-governmental organizations. The Committee developed The Work and Family Challenge Programme to make employers more aware of the realities of balancing work and family responsibilities. It commissioned a survey of public opinion on families and family life. It developed a learning and study guide about Canadian families that was distributed to all

Canadian elementary school principals. As important, it has encouraged innumerable events at the community level. We can say with confidence that Canadian non-governmental organizations have played an active role in promoting the International Year of the Family.

Last week, in collaboration with the United Nations International Year of the Family secretariat, the Canada Committee for the International Year of the Family, in conjunction with three Canadian non-governmental organizations, hosted "Today's Families: A Bridge to the Future", the closing conference for the Year. In his keynote address to this conference, held in Montreal, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, underlined the importance of strong families to society and the obligation Governments have to support them. The Conference itself laid out many of the issues that we must face long after the Year draws to a close. One result of the Montreal conference is the non-governmental statement about follow-up to the important work that has been accomplished through the Year. That non-governmental document was presented here today.

Some of the issues discussed in Montreal also form part of the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development. Canada endorses the progressive recommendations that resulted from the Conference and supports the Programme of Action agreed to in Cairo. In particular, we believe that improving the conditions of women and empowering them with choices will help to build better families, better societies and a better world.

In the same way, we look forward to the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, to take place in 1995. Canada believes that both conferences will benefit from the attention we have paid to the needs of families and all their members this year.

One of the most tangible effects of an international year is its influence on public policy. In recent months, the Government of Canada has taken a series of steps that will help benefit families. On 26 July, the Minister of Health, the Honourable Diane Marleau, announced the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programme. This Programme will support comprehensive, community-based efforts to provide food supplementation, nutrition and lifestyle counselling to pregnant women with a high risk of low-birth-weight babies. This Programme will help give the

smallest, most vulnerable members of a family the healthiest start possible in life.

On 5 October, the Federal Government released a discussion paper in which the Canadian people are asked to help set contemporary social security priorities. For more than 50 years Canadians have developed a large network of social programmes, and yet too many people find themselves without the help they need to adapt to a changing economy. One result has been an increase in child poverty. Another has been an increase in the number of families at the margins of our economy and society. The Government of Canada believes a government committed to stronger families must work to address these issues. It is committed to doing so.

The impact of the International Year of the Family will be felt in years to come through these issues and decisions in both the private and the public sectors. Canadians have told us that families are important. They expect all parts of society to work together to support families. Canada is proudly taking on that challenge.

The President: I call on Her Excellency, the Honourable Isabelle Leeds, United States of America Alternate Representative to the Forty-Ninth Session of the United Nations, General Assembly.

Mrs. Leeds (United States of America): The United States strongly supports protecting and strengthening the family as a basic social and economic unit. I would like to make a brief statement to describe the focus of some of the programmes in the United States leading up to the International Year of the Family.

The family provides the environment within which the next generation is born, sheltered, nourished and educated. Mothers and fathers must nourish the child with food and love, protect the child from harm, ensure that the child is cared for when ill, and provide the child's early education. The concern, therefore, is not only for children but for the capacity of parents to provide adequate care and stimulation for their children.

In the United States, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services has been the designated Federal Government coordinator for the International Year of the Family. Promoting the economic and social well-being of families, children and communities is the heart of the mission of the ACF.

Through its federal leadership, the ACF works to empower families and individuals to increase their economic independence. The ACF works also to develop supportive communities with a positive impact on the quality of life and development of people.

The ACF accomplishes its mission in partnerships with many others such as frontline workers, communities, states and native American communities, all joining together with one vision in mind: helping others.

Programmes and services administered by the ACF include: Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the nation's largest cash assistance programme; Head Start, a comprehensive child development programme for pre-school children; Family Preservation and Family Support to assist families in crisis; and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program, the nation's education and job-training programme for welfare recipients along with 60 other groups providing services to individuals and families in need.

Other departments and agencies of the Federal and state governments have undertaken specific measures to promote the Year, including the Extension System of the United States Department of Agriculture, which developed a three-year plan of action for the year, the Library of Congress, the United States Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps.

The Extension System organized a national task force made up of Extension professionals and representatives from the private sector. The task force adopted three goals from the United Nations publication on the International Year of the Family as themes in focusing its own work programme. These goals were: first, strengthening the family's ability to meet its own needs; secondly, understanding how families are affected by changes in publicly provided social services; and thirdly, recognizing that some of society's ills may adversely affect family relationships and acknowledging that government intervention through social policy may be needed to modify negative behaviour and discourage antisocial or detrimental practices in the family.

The national, state and local International Year of the Family educational programmes of the Extension System were implemented with an initiative that engendered a new focus on the family, and events that ensured continued attention to the welfare of the family.

The importance of the family system in all societies was also recognized by the United States Agency for International Development, which has adopted a closer focus on the role of the family in development. This approach to development is based on the premise that successful development must put people first through reflecting and responding to the realities and dynamics of daily life, which are most keenly felt at the level of the family and household.

Traditionally, development experts used gross national product statistics or numbers of targeted beneficiaries to measure the impact of their programmes. The result of this focus on macro-level statistics or individual interventions is that the family system, its role in society and its effect on individuals tend to be overlooked. Because there are many different family systems throughout the world, and even within countries, it is important to approach the design and implementation of programmes with an analysis of how intra-family relationships and gender roles influence the allocation of resources to individuals.

Focusing on families also highlights the fact that most people operate as members of family systems, not as isolated individuals. The betterment strategies of many households depend on maximizing the productive use of family resources, often across intergenerational lines.

It is within families that most individuals are nurtured, sheltered, educated and allocated resources. It is within the family that many decisions, often difficult ones, are made - whether or not to vaccinate a child; how long a child attends school; whether to invest in a business or spend on health and education. Health, housing, income, education and other social and economic factors are all interrelated, and it is within the family system that they come together.

We believe that focusing attention at the level of the family lets us see the interrelated needs of people so that assistance both at home and abroad can respond to their needs and priorities, rather than reflecting primarily the "solutions" of development specialists. It means building on the strengths and the potential of families, respecting their strategies for self-improvement and the rights of all family members.

Furthermore, focusing on intra-family dynamics and their influence on the lives of the family members is fundamental to sustainable development. Development is

based on understanding how resources are allocated within the household, who controls the resources, who makes the decisions, and why.

Today, many families are faced with stress as a result of poverty, disasters, disease, war or pandemics. Although families are resilient and have developed coping strategies when faced with adversity, many become so overwhelmed that they are no longer able to cope. The millions of children orphaned by AIDS or forced to work rather than go to school, or who are living or working on the street, are manifestations of stress on family systems.

Initiatives at all levels, national and international, governmental and non-governmental, need to enable families to have access to more and better choices for their own futures. As consumers of services such as family planning, education, water and sanitation, housing and banking, family members make difficult decisions every day regarding how they and their families will live.

Government policies in different sectors must provide the kind of environment within which families, whatever their structures, can not only survive but flourish. The knowledge and experience of non-governmental organizations are an invaluable resource. Often working in local communities, these organizations implicitly understand the fact that the needs of individuals are influenced by their family's resources, decisions and dynamics. Intra-household dynamics - what goes on within the family - influence not only who benefits, but ultimately whether the family's potential is realized.

For no matter what a family unit looks like today, the family remains the essential ingredient in shaping our later lives. All children need the love and support that only caring parents, caring adults can provide. As First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton said in recent remarks to a graduating university class,

"Family values alone cannot feed a hungry child, and material security cannot provide a moral compass. We need both. We need both within our families. We need both within our societies".

Two major United Nations events will take place next year: the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. These events, auspiciously occurring in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, will provide the opportunity to keep the international spotlight on the family, and we hope that official documents now being

drafted for these events will recognize the important role of the family in the social and economic development of all people.

For now, before the International Year of the Family comes to a close, let us all take the time to show our own families how much we cherish them, and to remember the needs of families everywhere.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call next on Her Excellency Mrs. Josefina Bilbao, Minister of the National Women's Service of Chile.

Mrs. Bilbao (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I am honoured to represent Chile before the Assembly, for it was the wish of President Eduardo Frei to entrust the National Women's Service with the task of coordinating and implementing all activities involving women and promotion of the family as the key to the nation's overall development. After chairing the national Commission for the Family established by former President Patrizio Aylwin to carry out an in-depth study of the family in Chile and to prepare extensive diagnosis of the subject, I was appointed by President Frei to head this Ministry. I am therefore in a position to say that for my Government the United Nations proclamation of the International Year of the Family was not merely timely but far-sighted, both for my country and for the entire international community.

We believe that the 1989 meeting marked a substantive advance in the promotion of human dignity and that it was far-sighted because the world has changed rapidly since 1989. In only half a decade a new international order has arisen. Its form is not yet clear, but we know that it brings with it advances in freedom and cooperation; that the banners of democracy and human rights will be held high; that globalization will rise to unimagined levels; that markets will expand; and that international security will be more firmly guaranteed.

But in this new international order there will be a cruel rise in the inequality of opportunities throughout the world. With the consolidation of societies that are freer, more advanced technologically, more responsible environmentally and more pluralistic culturally, contrasts persist that are unacceptable to the conscience of mankind. Poverty, unfulfilled basic human needs, unemployment and intolerance are problems that continue to affect all countries, but they are tragic in developing countries, and especially in the least advanced of them.

In this context, the family stands out once again conspicuously as the basic unit of society - overwhelmed but also the source of meaningful change. It stands out as the natural structure for fostering the potentials of all its members, and as the irreplaceable agent for social-development policies.

Chile welcomed the United Nations call to commemorate the International Year of the Family and wishes to share with the Assembly its pride at having done so with conviction and commitment. For we achieved the first of the goals also we had set ourselves: putting the family on our civic agenda. Today we as a society are more concerned with the family, because we understand it better. Studies carried out as part of the Year showed that family-related aspirations are a high priority among the majority in our country, and that there are many kinds of families facing many kinds of problems.

A traditionally private subject has become a public concern, and today we are redefining our social policies in terms of the criteria of integration and intersectoralism, which arise when planning is no longer part of an abstract ideal, but rather part of a flexible dialogue with reality itself.

The family is paramount for Chile because of our cultural identity, our historical memory and our traditions. Hence, we all know that to preserve the family is to be responsible for its development, for its changes, for its problems and difficulties and for its vast creative possibilities as an agent of the values that mobilize us as a nation.

We know that in many countries macroeconomic structural-adjustment policies have exacerbated unemployment and all the other manifestations of poverty and violence. We also know that there has been an especially hard impact on women, owing to their position in the workforce and in the family. The reduction or elimination of social services has affected women's access to employment and have transferred the burden of providing those services to families - and within those families, to women. This results from a structural situation that places unequal value on the activities of men and of women. In that connection, I believe that the main changes in the family in recent decades relate directly to changes in the status of women in various societies; we must recognize that linkage in devising modern, democratic policies.

Chile has successfully made the transition to democracy; our rate of economic growth has been some 6 per cent over the past decade. At the same time, our modernization has been imbalanced, and poverty persists.

The Government of President Eduardo Frei has clearly defined its priority: we aspire to the eradication of extreme poverty by the end of the century. In order to do this, we need more democracy, improved economic growth and social policies that will provide equal opportunities for the most marginalized. The family emerges as the prime and fundamental unit for the proper development of society.

The family is at the heart of our development aims, because in the family no one is superfluous, neither the elderly nor the disabled, nor can the new era be built as long as the inequality of women and the marginalization of youth persist, and as long as children continue to inherit from their parents and grandparents the lack of opportunities.

Because of this conviction, we strongly value the contribution made by the various international conferences convened by the United Nations on the relevant issues. It is therefore particularly important that this Conference precedes the one that will be held next year in Beijing on the subject of women.

The Sixth Regional Conference of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in preparation for the Beijing Conference, which has just been held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, came to the conclusion that we cannot conceive of the inclusion of women in the public sector unless there is greater equity in the private sector. This means that we also need to promote greater participation by men in family duties.

The International Year of the Family is a step towards the Fourth World Conference on Women; changes in individual sectors help to promote overall change.

The Government of Chile is taking important strides in its social policies for the benefit of women who are heads of households and in its policies for dealing with the situation of pregnant teenagers. We are developing a plan for the establishment of child-care centres for children of working mothers, and studies are being carried out with a view to creating networks for the support of victims of family violence. We have also made progress in legal reform. A few weeks ago, the

first legal text defining and imposing sanctions on violence within the family was promulgated, and there has also been a reform in the legal status of married women.

At present there is a draft before parliament concerning filiation, designed to ensure the equal status of all children before the law.

As regards our work in public policy, we are seeking to promote equality of opportunity for all types of family units, and to make the family a place that generates equal opportunities and rights for all its members. All of this is in line with Chile's ratification of international instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In order to build a suitable national awareness, the Government has undertaken to encourage public debate and to open up opportunities for families, in various fields and spheres, thus increasing their resources and their possibilities.

In this task, the National Service for Women has called on public and private organizations and on society in general to consider proposed policies that would benefit all families, whatever their nature and their origin, with a view to promoting real equality of opportunity for all.

Our commitment to generate clear equality of opportunity, without distinction as to sex or status, has also led us to participate with enthusiasm and hope in the World Summit for Social Development to be held by the United Nations in Copenhagen next year.

The experience of developing countries has increasingly shown us the hard truth that the democratic political system, as well as economic growth, will be hampered if they are not able to incorporate the most vulnerable sectors of society. It shows us also that without democracy and without growth it is also impossible to eradicate poverty.

The three imperatives are not successive stages. We cannot attempt to be first rich, then free, and later on just. This has always been the illusion of authoritarianism and populism. We know the results.

The struggle against poverty is an imperative of justice, but it is also one of efficacy. Either development is by all and for all, or, in the long term, it is by and for no one.

The struggle against poverty, against discrimination and against injustice is also a global struggle. It is as global today as are the markets and the media. Throughout history the family, despite its infinite variations, has always been the nucleus for the survival of mankind, as well as the great transmitter of the culture. Today too the family offers a great opportunity to make progress in realizing the universal values on the basis of which the United Nations was founded: the values of democracy, of peace, of freedom and of justice. The family continues to be the first and the primary nucleus in the building of a better humanity.

I am grateful for the opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the Government and people of Chile to the celebration of the International Year of the Family. Here, we have sown the seeds of the future, and the harvest, we are sure, will bear the fruit of human dignity.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.



General Assembly

Forty-ninth Session

37th Meeting

Wednesday, 19 October 1994, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Essy (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 95 (continued)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call first on the Parliamentary Secretary of State, Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Hungary, Mr. Mihály Kökény.

Mr. Kökény (Hungary): Let me state at the outset that the Government of the Republic of Hungary joined with pleasure and enthusiastic dedication in the United Nations initiative proposing that 1994 should be the International Year of the Family. Our pleasure and dedication were fuelled by the recognition that the family is a fundamental resource of the community and of society, and that, due to the manifold conflicts inherent in today's world, an increasing proportion of families need continual social support.

This need for support is particularly prevalent in today's Hungary. As members are aware, my country is in a state of transition. This process, accompanied by economic recession, has generated numerous social conflicts. Our Government and vulnerable Central and Eastern European Governments have been described as

rowing between the Scylla of an overburdened State budget and the Charybdis of the political unpopularity of social budget reform offering less-than-universal benefits. This scenario requires increased efforts to educate the public about the viability of various options, about the long-term costs of attempting to maintain a virtually defunct system and about the strength of solidarity based on cooperating families.

In my country all significant political elements agree with the slogan offered by the United Nations for this special year:

"Building the smallest democracy at the heart of society."

We understand and recognize that the family - the heart of society - is also the smallest unit of democracy. We believe that democracy begins with the family. A democratic society can be built on the basis of democratic families alone. Conversely, families that are democratic in their internal relationships can develop and function exclusively in democratic societies.

In Hungary the Year of the Family has, in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations, been intended as neither a single, isolated action nor as a representative campaign. It has been considered as an opportunity to call attention to the problems of families and, as such, perhaps to start rational political and social actions with a permanently beneficial influence on the lives of families.

The direct impact of unfavourable demographic changes on the life of the family is evident in the continuous reduction in the number of children per family in Hungary as well as in many other Central and Eastern European countries. This issue should not be considered exclusively from the standpoint of social policy. As we all know, a community of brothers and sisters creates a better and socially healthier environment for the child. The number of children is partially dependent on the scale of values prevailing in the family. For instance, how intense is the motivation and will of the parents to take on the responsibility of bringing up more children? On the other hand, there are also economic factors to consider: Are there enough resources to support more children without bringing the family's standard of living below the society average? We intend to consider both these factors in the course of developing Hungarian social policy. We are firmly committed to the development of a social policy that would provide more comprehensive support for families with several children.

With regard to governmental measures, the system of family allowances will be developed further in Hungary. We intend to introduce more measures favouring unemployed parents and impoverished families with several children. A child care allowance will be available on condition of citizenship as of 1 January 1995. The legislative preparations for the Act on Child Welfare and Protection have started. The Government will submit the draft bill to the Parliament early next year.

With this in mind, let me raise a point for further consideration. A United Nations statement on family-policy guidelines, similar to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, is lacking. Such a document may promote the elaboration of national family strategies in Member States. Perhaps the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development will dwell upon this issue.

The International Year of the Family has been marked by numerous national and international programmes in Hungary. Among the international events, we could mention the family conferences held jointly with our neighbouring countries. Many families met during these events, which shows that borders and walls previously separating them have now disappeared. I must also mention the noble gestures made by our families who have hastened to help refugee families that have been separated and driven from their homes. International charity organizations have been of great help in this work.

I would like to express our thanks to the representatives of the States present here who have informed us about their national programmes. We consider the Salt Lake City Family Patron City Programme to be an excellent initiative. Over 21 Hungarian cities have joined it, and in the years to come it plans to operate an international network among the family-patron cities.

I consider it very important to change our current concept of the family. Stepping out of narrow frames, it should be able to integrate the right to coexistence of all those who - as Austrian Minister Maria Rauch-Kallat put it so aptly at the Twenty-third Conference of Ministers of Family Affairs in Paris - form the community of generations bearing responsibility for each other within the family. We can now see the United Nations in the same way: as a family of nations bearing responsibility for each other.

In the course of the Year of the Family, Hungary has opted for the path of development by choosing the family. Our motto for the Year of the Family expresses this well: everyone needs a family, and the family counts on everyone. We thank the General Assembly for giving us this Year.

Finally, let me read out a message from Mrs. Zsuzsanna Göncz, wife of His Excellency the President of the Hungarian Republic, to the participants of the International Conference on Families in New York:

"I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the valuable efforts made by the United Nations to look for solutions and responses to the burning questions of social problems we are facing today. I firmly believe that the family, as the smallest unit of society, is the most suitable cell for people to discover all forms of traditions and, at the same time, to learn the various rules of our social life. Therefore, I believe there is a pressing need for recognizing the irreplaceable role of the family and making every effort to restore its honour, for the sake of mankind and future generations. Being a mother as well as the wife of the President of the Republic of Hungary, I hope that with my humble charity activities I can contribute to the revival of the family in Hungary. I wish the General Assembly all the best in its work and success in its noble efforts."

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Aleksander Luczak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education of Poland.

Mr. Luczak (Poland): I am honoured to address this Assembly of representatives of States from all over the world.

It is a matter of special satisfaction to me that it was Poland that first came up with the initiative to proclaim an International Year of the Family, following its earlier proposal to draw up a Convention on the Rights of the Child. In proposing that the United Nations proclaim an International Year of the Family, we were guided by the belief that the family has always played an essential role in the lives of individuals and society alike. It fulfils extremely important functions, both economic and educational. It enables people to express themselves in everyday life and stimulates positive emotions.

Indeed, the family constitutes a universal social unit which closely integrates the interests of the individual and the public. Basically, it performs a similar role in all countries, regardless of social and economic systems, religious beliefs or social and regional circumstances. The leading moral, political and religious authorities have been turning to the family as the most durable asset and primary hope for the future, for the family is the first and irreplaceable educator, the basis for the transmission of the values system and inter-generational experience.

The people of Poland have always cherished family life. The Polish family has preserved national culture and transmitted its values to the young generations, even though by the eighteenth century the country had disappeared from the world political map. The family played a distinctive role in maintaining national identity.

The fundamental political, social and economic transformations in today's world have a bearing of their own on the functioning of families. As a result, the priorities of social and individual values are changing, as are the norms, patterns and models of life. Yet nothing can replace the family in its educational and social functions. Therefore, it is of singular importance to draw the attention of the international community to the need for a comprehensive approach to the family in order to ensure the family's development and provide it with satisfactory living conditions and protection.

To some extent these issues were tackled by the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna last

year. The same issues are also being pursued by various international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Documents produced by these forums, including the Final Document of the recent Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the Maastricht Treaty's provisions regarding social policies and the papal proposal for a charter of the rights of the family, to mention but a few, tend to define a universal family policy. Efforts are being made to formulate a universal declaration on the rights of the family that could be adopted by the General Assembly. This is surely a challenge, in view of the different family-life traditions in various countries. I hope, none the less, that obstacles to such a declaration will be surmounted.

Systemic changes under way in Poland, including the advanced stage of transition to a market economy, necessitate the prompt elaboration of a new concept of social policies, particularly with respect to families. It is important that such efforts be woven into a coherent system covering legal regulations, financial and in-kind subsidies and services offered by public institutions.

During the ongoing transformations in Poland, a host of negative phenomena affect families: falling standards of living; rising unemployment; and emigration or job-seeking abroad. Credit facilities for housing are scarce and expensive. Companies have drastically reduced the scope of social benefits. Consequently, the economic and social security of many families has diminished. It is incumbent upon the Government to cushion the negative side-effects of transition - without altering the essential direction of reform.

During the International Year of the Family the Government of Poland has taken specific actions in favour of the family:

The 1994-1997 Programme of Socio-Economic Policies contains a comprehensive pro-family package. Some of its measures have already been set in motion.

Reform of the social security system is subject to intensive analysis.

Tax privileges have been introduced to favour married couples and single parents.

An improved mother-and-child and young people's health-care programme is being implemented.

A system of family doctors is planned.

Family-friendly hospitals are being created.

A debt-reduction programme in respect of public schools taken over by local councils, subsidized from the State budget, is in operation.

The State budget covers arrears of interest for housing credits owed to banks.

Many ad hoc steps have been taken to help children with disabilities and to help young people.

We are aware that all this is far from sufficient. Unfortunately, the country's present economic situation does not permit us to do more, nor can we afford to increase our budget deficit.

The United Nations did well to focus on the family in 1994. The family has become the subject of wide-ranging, active and constructive international collaboration. Support for the family is a fundamental social responsibility for every Member State, whatever its social and political systems and no matter what differences exist in terms of religion or customs. Let me take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family and his staff for discharging their responsibilities in successfully preparing for this important event.

Many activities directly related to the International Year of the Family have been launched in Poland. Last April we hosted in Warsaw the XVIII International Congress of Families, organized in close cooperation with the World Organization for the Family, with broad support from the Catholic Church in Poland.

Smaller-scale events have also taken place, including a conference organized by the Polish Consumers Federation. Further symposia and conferences on the family are planned.

The National Committee for the Year of the Family is active in Poland. It was set up on the initiative of the Polish Parliament and is headed by the Speaker of its lower Chamber. One of the Committee's top priorities was, in accordance with United Nations guidelines, to initiate national and local actions to alleviate the hardships of everyday life of families and assist the resolution of conflicts within the family.

The Committee succeeded in organizing summer holidays for a large number of children from low-income families and for children requiring special care. On its initiative, a number of local committees were formed in the provinces. Together with other nongovernmental organizations, those committees launched social welfare activities and the counselling of women and set up clubs and care centres for children, the elderly and young people from low-income families and from families at risk.

The observance of the International Year of the Family in my country will thus contribute to the elaboration by the Government and non-governmental organizations of various forms of assistance to the family and its members in this difficult period of systemic transformations. To this end, the Polish National Committee has outlined as its long-term objectives and following up to the International Year: elaborating a national programme of action in favour of the family, women and the younger generation; making necessary amendments to laws and regulations so as to improve the condition of family life and the well-being of the younger generation; introducing national and local measures to ease the hardships of everyday life of families; interesting the media in family issues; promoting such values as mutual respect, tolerance, solidarity and responsibility within the family; persuading researchers to take up the subjects of the modern family and its perspectives; organizing conferences on the role and function of the family under present conditions of social development; and increasing cooperation with national and international organizations on family-related issues.

We are determined to continue working together towards the multifaceted development of the family, taking advantage of such forthcoming international occasions as the World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Copenhagen next spring, or the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held next autumn in Beijing.

When the International Year is over concern for the welfare, stability and sustained development of the family should continue to be at the centre of the attention of the international community, the United Nations system, and regional and non-governmental organizations. My Government fully supports extension of the efforts to attain the noble goals of the International Year of the Family and shares the lasting commitment of the United Nations to the family.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Soares (Portugal): It is a great honour for me to address the International Conference on Families on behalf of my country and to have this opportunity to express views on such crucial issues as those relating to the International Year of the Family.

The Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Families and Senior Citizens of Germany has already addressed the Conference on behalf of the 12 States of the European Union, expressing positions that Portugal fully subscribes to. Nevertheless, I would like to convey some reflections relating to matters of great interest to my country.

When 1994 was proclaimed the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly reiterated that the United Nations had acknowledged that families were the basic units of social life. In the same vein, the major United Nations instruments on human rights and social policy call for the widest possible protection to be accorded to the family.

In my country the family occupies a key position in the political and social system. We believe that the family is an essential element in achieving the cohesion of the social fabric. It is within the family that individuals can begin to develop their personalities to fulfil themselves as human beings, and it is within families that the different generations can find better opportunities to come together and interact.

These concerns found a place in the Portuguese Constitution, which states that the family, as a fundamental unit of society, is entitled to the protection of society and the State and to the creation of all the conditions necessary for the personal realization of its members.

The family as a source of moral values is an age-old reality for us, one that has stood the test of time and resisted the challenge of fashion and circumstance. The Portuguese policy on the family takes into account modernity and progress and is inspired by the development and improvement in material living conditions, but it remains deeply committed to the humanistic values of a people and nation with many centuries of history.

The International Year of the Family was therefore, from the Portuguese point of view, a most welcome initiative, and Portugal has participated wholeheartedly in

its observance. I should like to recall that we established a Commission for the International Year of the Family, presided over by the Prime Minister. Among other activities, the Commission undertook a programme to heighten public awareness of the theme "Family, a value to be promoted". The Commission carried out its work in close cooperation with local and regional authorities, schools, churches and non-governmental organizations, in order to achieve the goal of creating, among policy makers and the public at large, greater awareness of the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society.

I should also like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk Sokalski, for the support he gave us and to congratulate him and his collaborators for the excellent work that has been done so far.

The International Year of the Family should constitute the starting-point of a long-term process. Its follow-up deserves special attention. We must ensure that the ideas and recommendations that were put forward will materialize in concrete actions.

Next year two important world conferences will take place - the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing - in which issues related to the family will be at the centre of the debates. In this context, I should like to underline our main concerns on family policies.

Our basic aim will be to promote the widest possible protection and assistance to the family as the basic unit of society, so that it may fully assume its responsibilities within the community, and at the same time to ensure the promotion of equal and full enjoyment of the human rights of all family members, with special emphasis on the equal rights, responsibilities and participation of women.

As has frequently been said on other occasions, the family, as the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is the fullest reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of a community. As such, the family is the ideal framework for an integrated and comprehensive approach to social policies. The promotion of a strong and dynamic family is an important element in the construction of an equally strong, democratic and dynamic society.

In conclusion, allow me to express the hope that the work of the International Year of the Family will

contribute to the fulfilment of one of the themes of the United Nations - to build the smallest democracy in the heart of society.

The President (*interpretation from French*): The next speaker is the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, of the Republic of Guyana, Ms. Claudette Moore, upon whom I now call.

Ms. Moore (Guyana): It is indeed a great honour for me to address this meeting on a matter of considerable importance to my country and to the international community of nations. I bring with me the hope that this debate will assist in the furtherance of our work in the International Year of the Family, and particularly in the elaboration of an international plan of action.

The situation of the family is precious in Guyana, a land of six peoples who nevertheless have one destiny, for we subscribe to the dictum that a nation is as strong as its families. In fact, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, in addressing a rally to usher in the International Year of the Family in January 1994, made the point that:

"The family is obviously the nucleus of all social, economic and political aspects of life, bound together by blood, unity of purpose and, most of all, tradition. And this family nucleus influences future generations."

The United Nations declaration of 1994 as the International Year of the Family was timely and afforded us, not only the opportunity to refocus on the importance of the family, but to formulate a national plan of action which could take us beyond the end of 1994 and into the twenty-first century.

In this connection a National Coordinating Committee was established in November 1993 to give effect to those efforts. The objectives of the National Committee were, first, an increased awareness of family issues at the level of government as well as in the private sector; secondly, the stimulation of efforts to respond to problems affecting and affected by the situation of families; an improvement in the collaboration among national and non-governmental organizations in support of multisectoral activities and, lastly, building upon the results of international activities concerning women, youth, the aged and the disabled.

Given the broad objectives and the seriousness attached to each objective, it was found desirable to

establish subcommittees under the following headings: moral and legal, the disabled, youth, and the work environment. Members of the subcommittees were drawn from government agencies and from non-governmental organizations.

However, we did not leave the matter there, for it was recognized that the public must be sensitized. Hence, the Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, whose Ministry was designated as the focal point, delivered a New Year's message outlining the theme, objectives and programme for the Year. He also expressed the hope that the activities would

"leave a lasting impression upon our minds and permanently guide our actions related to the uplifting of the family and our nation".

Immediately following this announcement, non-governmental organizations, and in particularly the Church, initiated a launching ceremony at which the main speaker was His Excellency Dr. Cheddie Jagan, the President of Guyana. Programmes of awareness extended through March 1994 and involved government officials as well as Guyanese families.

I shall now focus on the more serious work of the subcommittees that I identified earlier.

The Moral and Legal Sub-Committee has produced a draft family code. This was disseminated across the nation on 15 May 1994, which was observed as the International Day of Families. Work will continue with a view to incorporating all the views and issues that should be contained in such a code. This Sub-Committee has also begun to work on proposals for the establishment of a family court, with some input from senior legal professionals.

The Sub-Committee for the Disabled will shortly execute plans that have been made for what is called Disability Awareness Month, which will commence on 4 November 1994 and will culminate, on 3 December, in observance of the International Day of the Disabled.

The activities that are planned will focus on the mentally retarded, the physically handicapped, the visually handicapped, and the deaf and blind. The Ministry of Health, as Guyana's lead Ministry on disability, is in the process of reorganizing and expanding the National Rehabilitation Committee as a National

Commission on Disability, one of whose first tasks will be the formulation of a national disability policy.

Guyana can be described as a young country as 40 per cent, or more, of its population are below 35 years of age. Programmes to demonstrate the importance of youth and the complementary nature of family members in the development of literacy skills, civic consciousness, moral education and family values were undertaken in collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Programme as part of our observances.

This approach, involving the training and guidance of semi-literate people by literate members of society, was intended to emphasize the position and status of the family as a key social institution, to reinforce family ties and to have a multiplier effect on the rest of society.

Consistent with its commitment to youth, the Government submitted a paper on national youth policy in June 1994. It is intended that the mechanisms established will provide young people with scope for self-expression and will make provision for appropriate programme development.

The efforts of the Work Environment Committee, on the other hand, are geared to securing the involvement of the private sector and social-service institutions to assist in improving working conditions for people with family responsibilities. We have set as the major focus the achievement of the International Labour Organization's aim of ratification of Convention 156 during this year or shortly thereafter. In August 1994 a national workshop was held, with representatives of government, trade unions, employers and non-governmental organizations participating. It is noteworthy that, as a consequence, Guyana has fulfilled all preliminary legal requirements for ratification of this Convention.

Conventions 100, 111 and 142 having been ratified, the Constitution of Guyana provides every citizen with the right to work and to free selection in accordance with social requirements and personal qualifications. It also provides for men and women to enjoy equal rights and the same legal status in all spheres of economic life. In addition, the Equal Rights Act 1990 removes all forms of discrimination based on sex and provides for equal opportunities for men and women. The work of this Committee is therefore concentrated on the establishment of the social infrastructure that is necessary to alleviating the burden of family responsibilities on the productivity of workers.

The establishment of adequate care facilities for children in and out of school, elderly people and other family members is currently being examined. As an extension of our work in this area, Guyana will join other countries in the Caribbean in a regional workshop later in the year. It is hoped that efforts will then be combined to develop strategies for implementation of the Convention at the regional level.

Guyana has signalled its commitment to "the emergence of a global humanitarian order" in which international development and cooperation will focus on the welfare of people. The circumstances of people who comprise a family unit are many and varied. Nevertheless, if given the necessary resources and support through appropriate legislation and policy, families could play a major role in advancing development.

Changes in the structure and composition of families have been almost universal, but important socio-economic and cultural functions performed by families should be preserved and transmitted to succeeding generations. Guyana will therefore seek to ensure that a plan of action is informed by the deliberations and activities of the International Year of the Family, with goals peculiar to our local situation but consistent with the universality of the human family.

The President (*interpretation from French*): The meeting began at 10.10 a.m., yet only eight out of 184 delegations have representatives in the Hall. The eight delegations, which include those of the first three speakers in the debate, are those of Egypt, Germany, Hungary, India, Poland, Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America.

I now call on Ms. Mercedes Pulido Briceño, Minister for the Family of Venezuela.

Mrs. Pulido de Briceño (Venezuela) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Government of Venezuela attaches particular importance to the discussion of social matters. When we speak of social matters we necessarily look to the major agent in the building of society, which is, of course, the family.

The International Year of the Family, as one of the major political and economic events that have affected our lives, has been a focus for action and for recognition of the fact that the aspirations of society go beyond the

obvious, beyond the mere meeting of basic needs, and seek fulfilment in people's hopes and values.

Venezuela has welcomed large waves of immigrants. In the framework of a mixture of races, we have a society characterized by egalitarian values. In our society the family has been the meeting place between the aspiration to equality on the one hand and, on the other, the need to make up for many deficiencies. Cultures meet in the family, and social mobilization is part of that reality.

We are aware that there may be discrimination, but above and beyond this we have a society which is hard to classify socially. The many years of extolling individualism have not undermined our families. Their daily lives are marked by friendship, interaction and solidarity. We are grateful for this opportunity, at such a difficult time, to focus our attention on the family, to discover all the ways in which it is organized, as a flexible and clear response to the need to adapt to new times. The realities of shortages and changes in family life in our society demonstrate that decisions based solely on the quest for material and technological progress are outdated. Now more than ever we must address the cultural values and aspirations that give meaning to our lives as we face the future.

How can coexistence be achieved without strengthening people, the basis of the entire life cycle. The institution of the family is the basic cell, because that is where we are born, where we live and where we die. Until recently, the family was a purely private setting; we were indifferent to it; we did not want to get involved in the discussions that were part of everyday life. We wanted to devote ourselves only to ensuring the normalcy of the collectivity. However, the fact is that today family violence, crime, drugs, abuse and slavery are part of family relations. They are part of our families' daily lives, based on traditional habits and values that will determine our future.

How can we envisage democracy if the family does not understand the need to strengthen democratic links from the very moment we come into the world? Can we claim to be able to face the future without identifying the right kinds of social relationships, limiting ourselves to satisfying basic, partial needs? Poverty is not simply a matter of social indicators. It is a culture of survival, in which humans wear themselves out day after day trying to look beyond the next 24 hours. In this world, there is not time to develop options or opportunities or aspirations to build social relations that go beyond the immediate.

Responsible parenthood, which is a reality in our region, is not simply a matter of will. Among our young people today, 30 per cent are excluded from the school system, while 20 per cent leave the school system for a life of poverty. One cannot be a responsible parent if one does not have the ability to produce the income that is necessary to provide for the needs of a household, if society has not redefined the role of men vis-a-vis the advancement of the status of women, if poverty means a lack of prospects for the future. How can one assume responsibility without taking all those factors into account?

The International Year of the Family has involved opening up new channels for discussion in Venezuelan society. The disabled; children with special problems; the elderly - who have been ignored up to now; street children; working children; those bound by slavery, to a certain point, in the rural areas; mothers who themselves are only children; what we call the feminization of poverty: these are all factors which cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Thirty-eight percent of our population - 580,000 families - lives in a state of critical poverty. Many of them are products of migration. Our country, in this context, is a symbol of prospects for the future. We are not yet able to deny this opportunity to other peoples, but we must also face our inability to find our own identity. Social problems associated with poverty result in a lack of participation in society. Our challenge is not just to develop social-integration policies; we must aim for a model of development which will make it possible to include major sectors of society, with their own particular and very real circumstances, and change the nature of current participation so as to develop an overall vision.

What has been the strategy of our country? Three major problems have been the focus of our attention. First, there are the children under six years of age. Here, in addition to health, nutrition and education indicators, we have seen a great expansion in household-centred programmes and day-care programmes, in which the working mother, is given the option of being incorporated into civil society through other channels that enable them to do more than just meet basic needs, channels for participation in local decision-making, channels for participation in the decentralization of the country.

The second major problem is the eight- to sixteen-year-old category. We have not forgotten the adolescents. We are talking, really, about children under six and about 18-year-olds. This is our major social challenge. That is why we have a wide-ranging programme - like our Ayacucho Fund - that uses oil income for the training of human resources in higher education. We have allocated 4 billion bolivars for training our citizens, for integrating our young people from 8 to 16 years old into the labour market.

The diversification of the local economy could be an option for the future, but at the present time, our local, informal economy, without technology or social security, does very little to incorporate our young people. I should like to take this opportunity to outline the major options involved in our definition of family policy.

Mrs. Burmester de Maynard (Uruguay), took the Chair.

Public policies, focused solely on caring for vulnerable sectors of the population, are merely a segment of the concept of integration. Family policies should regard the family as a component of the social, political and economic elements.

I wish to make another point that I find interesting. While it is very tempting to focus on the most vulnerable, we also need to develop elite groups that have the ability to shape and direct that sector. If the State is to have an authoritarian and centralizing role, it must involve all the groups of civil society, not simply as interlocutors of the State, but as interlocutors of a society which is also capable of diversification.

There are two aspects to the readjustment of family policies. First, we believe that assistance policies are needed. When we have such large sectors that are poor, we cannot expect them to have the strength to make the journey by themselves. It has often been said that we should not give the people fish, but should teach them how to fish. But we wonder if it is not also necessary to give them the strength to hold the fishing-rod.

The second aspect relates to social-investment policies in which the conditions are established for the family to play its socializing role. We cannot blame families for not playing that role if we take away from them the tools for change. Why do we take the family into account nowadays? Because technological and material progress have failed to respond to our needs for development as

human beings. If, as has been stated in the context of the social summit, we really want to design participative policies, then family policies must provide for relations of interdependence; of globalization of the problems of society; of reinterpretation of the values of equity, solidarity and civil responsibility. The collectivity must be rebuilt as an expression of all human beings. Only in this way can we say that we are really caring for our people.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of China, Mr. Wang Xuexian.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The United Nations is a big international family composed of 184 Member States. It is therefore not only appropriate but also very important for this big family to devote these meetings of the General Assembly to a commemoration of the International Year of the Family. This in itself shows that the question of the family has become an issue of greater significance to the international community as well as an important item on the agenda of the United Nations.

On behalf of the Chinese Government, I wish warmly to welcome the convening of these meetings. We deeply appreciate the fruitful work carried out by the Secretariat of the United Nations, the regional preparatory meetings and, in particular, Mr. Sakolski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family.

Since the adoption by the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session of the resolution which proclaimed 1994 the International Year of the Family, countries in all parts of the world have made positive responses. Centring on the year's theme of "Family Harmony and Progress", national Governments and the international community as a whole have all worked enthusiastically in the wide-ranging preparations for the Year. These activities have helped draw people's attention to the question of family, deepened their understanding of various economic, social and population elements of the issue of family, enhanced the various countries' efforts in formulating or adjusting their family policies and programmes, and promoted international cooperation in the sphere of the family.

It has always been an important part of the Chinese culture to attach importance to families and their values. This tradition has been enhanced by the development of family relations towards equality, democracy and harmony. We the Chinese have always taken pride in

our happy and harmonious families. China now has more than 260 million families; they constitute the structure of China's modern society, abounding with unprecedented vitality. The healthy build-up of these families, which enables people to live in harmony and friendship, is conducive to the stability and development of the entire society. The Chinese Government has responded actively to the International Year of the Family and carried out a series of instructive activities, including some of the following events.

In May last year, China had the honour to invite representatives or observers from 26 countries and regions and 17 United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to participate in the Asia and Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, held in Beijing. The meeting was highly successful, and the Beijing Declaration it adopted was viewed with favour by all sides.

In February 1993, the Chinese Government set up its own Coordinating Committee composed of representatives of a dozen Government departments and organizations. Over the past year China has carried out many diverse activities, organized and guided by its national Committee.

On 15 May this year, Beijing celebrated the International Day of the Family. Many specialists, scholars and governmental officials participated in the activities, going into the main streets and outdoor public places to explain and give advice and answer questions on China's family law and to share their specific legal and scientific knowledge.

On the same day, the award ceremony for the Model Family was held. Before the ceremony, there were nation-wide activities in connection with the choice of the model family. Thirty families won gold, silver and other honorary awards. They are all families that have made significant contributions to society and enjoy family harmony and rich family life, thus winning great respect.

Special television programmes on the family, including performances by individual families, have been shown. Similar performances have also been telecast at the grass-roots level in both urban and rural areas.

Seminars on family culture have been conducted for an exchange of views and useful experiences and to put forward recommendations for future work.

The International Symposium on the Family and the Next Generation was held to discuss the building of family culture and youth education.

These activities are very popular among the Chinese people and have helped deepen people's affection for their families.

It is well known that the family is the natural and basic unit of society and plays a very important role in social development. The family is both the beneficiary of and the active participant in social development. Without happy and harmonious families, it is impossible to maintain a happy and harmonious society. We therefore believe that it is essential for the activities of the International Year of the Family to continue in the interest of individual families as well as all mankind. The Chinese Government and people are willing to work with other members of the international community and to make their due contribution to collective efforts.

Finally, we wish to express our sincere hope that all families in the world will have a life full of sunshine and love, that every child in the world will grow up loved and cared for, that all the elderly will be well provided for and live in comfort, that all families in the world will enjoy harmony and progress, and that society will enjoy peace and development.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Permanent Representative of Paraguay, Mr. José Félix Fernández Estigarribia.

Mr. Fernandez Estigarribia (Paraguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States at this meeting on the International Year of the Family.

This commemoration is particularly timely, now that the subject of the family has been reinstated on our agendas. If we look at the Constitutions of all the countries in our Group, we find that, for the most part, they explicitly guarantee the rights of the family. Furthermore, none of us can turn our back on the

important debate that the family is deeply engaged in today. Although we accept the family's historical values, it is at present in a state of flux because of the staggering changes that have taken place in world society.

When we speak about change in our societies and its influence on the issue now before us, it cannot escape us that the family is at the same time and from another standpoint a powerful renovating agent. It is in the family that generally accepted knowledge is reassessed and subtly added to and changed, without losing sight of the essential values of our common civilization.

For this reason strengthening our democracies also involves intensifying the debate on the role of the family because of its influence as a first educator of free and egalitarian consciences.

This of course is a long-standing concern of the United Nations. To prove that assertion, we need only glance again at the remarkable Convention on the Rights of the Child, one of the most broadly ratified instruments.

For that reason we cannot fail to mention the momentous conclusions of the regional preparatory meeting which took place in Cartagena, Colombia, from 10 to 14 August, and which reflect the aspirations of the region. In this vein, and only by way of reference in view of the importance of each and every one of its results, we should like to refer to the way in which the text addresses the question of variables in the composition of the family and the widespread concern about how poverty affects the family structure.

We should bear in mind that families, particularly those living in marginal urban and rural areas, are involved in new forms of survival, including in many cases, self-managing organizations which permit them in solidarity to tackle the economic crisis while playing a leading role in the process of change in society.

With regard to social commitment, despite the difficult economic situation, and notwithstanding the scarcity of resources, Governments in many of our countries have striven to focus their attention on families beset by the problems of poverty, particularly those in

extreme poverty, in the form of social support programmes designed to improve their living conditions.

The basis for the recovery of the family, which is needed for greater promotion of human rights, equality between the sexes, individual freedoms and greater emphasis on the rights of the child, will be determined by the extent of international cooperation and governmental concern.

In this respect we should like to bring forward a new point of concern about the scope of the family. In the last decade of the twentieth century there have been two major trends - the ageing of the population and the development of family structures. These trends may be regarded as different aspects of modernization and call for a substantive response from Governments and from various members of the family.

As a result there is a need to broaden our knowledge about the way in which changes in family and household structures are associated with changes in the age structure of the population. In particular, we need a better understanding of the way in which the proportion of elderly people has grown as a result of the influences and effects that stem from economic and social change and at the same time the influence that growth has had on those changes.

Previously it was believed that the ageing of the population was a phenomenon that was particularly characteristic of the developed countries. However, United Nations forecasts indicate that the ageing of the population most strikingly affects the developing world, as shown by the following statistics.

In a study carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean it was estimated that in 1980 there were more than 23 million people aged over 60 in Latin America. A total of 40 million is forecast for the year 2000, and 93 million for the year 2025. At the same time, life expectancy at birth will rise in Latin America from 51.2 years for the period 1950-1955 to 71.8 years for the period 2020-2025. This indicates that this region cannot be considered a "young region", as there is an accelerated demographic transition taking place towards lower birth and mortality rates.

We trust that in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen major steps forward will be taken in the process of consolidating the family structure.

For these reasons, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and on behalf of my country I should like to reaffirm our unswerving commitment to strengthening our efforts in order to give reality to the principle that every person has the right to form a family and that in the formation and development of that family men and women have the same rights and duties.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on Ms. Ruth Wijdenbosch, Chairperson of the National Committee for the Year of the Family of Suriname.

Ms. Wijdenbosch (Suriname): The proclamation by the United Nations of the International Year of the Family has offered all Governments and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to highlight the importance of the family, increase awareness of family issues, strengthen national efforts to respond to problems affecting the family and create greater understanding of societies for the specific difficulties the family is facing in our rapidly changing world.

The preparatory meetings at regional and international level, combined with the facilitating activities of the secretariat of the International Year of the Family, have produced many valuable proposals which have guided national committees in formulating their national programmes. The challenge of formulating national programmes to support the family has been fully taken up by most States Members of the United Nations and the reports presented on the implementation of the programmes are strong testimony to the success of this undertaking.

We firmly believe that to guarantee a more successful implementation of these programmes, a framework of conditions should be met in order to create opportunities for development, to affirm an improvement in standards of living, and a higher quality of life for the family.

The International Year of the Family has provided us with a unique opportunity to give human development in all

its aspects the high priority it deserves in the context of the recently held International Conference on Population and Development and the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, and Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing. These meetings give the international community the opportunity adequately to address the problems of poverty, unemployment, disintegration and disease and how they affect the family. Taking the aforementioned into consideration, we are happy to note that there is a general understanding among the members of the international community on the relationship between conditions for development and the well-being of the family.

The interrelationship between the position of the family, sustained economic growth and sustainable development has been the leading approach in the formulation and implementation of the national programme of Suriname. This is reflected in the theme chosen for the International Year of the Family by the national committee, namely, "The Family in Changing Socio-economic Circumstances".

The Suriname National Committee, which was established in June 1993 by the Minister for Social Affairs and Housing, attributes high priority to the social and human dimensions of development. We are aware of the fact that, by placing the human being in the centre, a vital contribution can be made towards our common goal of achieving sustainable human development. Therefore we support the integration of programmes to promote the development of the family into overall social and economic development planning. The concept that social and family issues are a secondary matter in contrast with the primary process taking place in the political forums, is a serious mistake.

The history of Suriname and the multi-ethnic composition of its population have resulted in a variety of family structures. Therefore, the Government has given due consideration to the specific social, economic and cultural priorities and needs of the various family types and their individual members. In Suriname we distinguish the following family structures: the nuclear family, a two-generation family which can be seen in our society in many variations such as the two-parent family, the step-family and the adoption family; the extended

family, the most common variations of which are the two- and three-generation families; the reorganized family; and the single-parent family.

Please allow me briefly to explain the difficulties the single-parent family is confronted with in my country. The single-parent family, in most cases with a woman at its head, can be found in the capital as well as in the rural areas. In Suriname, 25 per cent of the working women are also head of the family, and the number is increasing as a result of the economic crisis my country is going through. Studies have shown that the majority of these women have a low education level and, therefore, exercise the lowest paid professions. At the same time, they suffer the most from the economic crisis, which compels them to use survival strategies, such as looking for additional income, adjusting the expenditure of their income by saving on food and other basic needs, and by involving their children in income-generating activities to increase the family income.

The Government of Suriname is fully aware of the situation of this specific group and has therefore committed itself, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, to give special attention and assistance to needy single-parent families through ensuring credit and funding for women's self-help groups. Furthermore, the Government also guarantees elementary services in the fields of health, education and housing for this vulnerable group.

Let me now turn briefly to the activities carried out by the Suriname National Committee. The Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname, consists of 14 representatives of ministries and religious and non-governmental organizations. The Government of Suriname fully supports the Committee and underlines the importance of the role of the family in our society. The Suriname Committee has decided that its role is not to implement a programme of activities or launch a set of new initiatives on its own, but rather to increase awareness of family issues all over the country and to encourage organizations to respond to the problems and needs of the family, and to offer technical and financial support to do so.

In this respect, the Committee, at the beginning of the year, brought together a variety of organizations active in the field of strengthening the role of the family, which identified 28 projects in the areas of health care, food production, education, youth, the advancement of women, and research and data collection. Some of these projects have already been implemented, while some will be executed in 1995. The United Nations Children's Fund selected and is in the process of financing three of these projects: the recruitment of foster families, a health project in a number of Amerindian villages and a school garden project which teaches children how to till the land. Other projects were financed by several local funding agencies, the private sector and the Government.

The Suriname Committee is of the view that the issues of gender equity, equality and the empowerment of women constitute the basic pillars of the family programmes and that they can facilitate the efforts to achieve the common goal of sustainable development. For this reason, the role of women in the national programme for the family has been underlined.

We are committed to the process of integrating the programme of action for the family in our national development programme, taking into account the strong links between the well-being of the family and sustainable development. In this regard, the Committee is in the process of preparing a recommendation to the Government to establish a national institute for the family, which will act as a coordinating body for all present and future policies and activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations involved with issues regarding the family and development. We are of the firm belief that this activity in the sphere of institutional strengthening, when combined with activities in the field of research and data collection, and with the necessary international support of organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, will have a positive impact on the Surinamese family.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Organization for the praiseworthy initiative of organizing this Conference, thus enabling national committees to exchange experiences and discuss follow-up activities on

an issue of such great importance for all our countries and peoples.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on the representative of the Russian Federation, Her Excellency Mrs. Ludmilla Bezlepkina, Minister for Social Protection.

Mrs. Bezlepkina (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): I am greatly honoured to address the Assembly on the question of the family. The Russian Federation is a strong supporter of the ideals and principles of the International Year of the Family; we base our family policy on the permanent and unchanging value of the family for the life and development of the individual and on its importance to society in terms of raising new generations, achieving social stability and progress, and supporting social peace and harmony.

On that basis, the Russian Federation attaches great importance to this question, which the General Assembly is rightly discussing. We greatly appreciate the efforts of United Nations experts in carrying out the activities of the International Year of the Family. We convey special thanks to Mr. Henryk Sakolski, whose participation in the work of the International Scientific and Practical Conference on the Family and the Development Process, held at Moscow in November 1993, enhanced the importance of that Conference. The report of the Conference was published in an edition of 1,500 copies and has been useful to a large number of scientists and practical workers.

I believe that today it is not all that important to take stock of what has been done this year, the International Year of the Family. Russia has submitted to today's Conference on the question of the family a brief report entitled "Policy Relating to the Family and the Holding of the International Year of the Family in the Russian Federation". Those wishing to do so are welcome to familiarize themselves with it. We will be able to discuss the results of the International Year of the Family at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. I can state with full confidence that the activities carried out at the federal level and also at the regional and local levels met with broad support and approval on the part of both the local authorities and the population, and helped to achieve social peace and harmony even in the very complex and

contradictory times of this transitional period in the social and economic development of Russia.

Today I should like to draw attention to world-wide trends whose emergence at the national level is causing great concern. I refer to the reduction in the level at which the family, as a social institution, can provide its members with social and physical security. The factors at work here are the growth of poverty, violence, the number of orphans, loneliness, drug addiction, prostitution and alcoholism. These are all characteristics of our times. Above all, we should be concerned about protecting the interests and the rights of children, who are totally dependent on the decisions and actions of adults; but their future will depend on what those decisions and actions are.

The interests of the family are not taken into account in determining the processes of historical development. As a consequence, families frequently do not manage to adapt to social changes. Society as a whole pays a very high social price for this. Have we really been creating and are we still creating systems and structural institutions that are equal to the continuing processes of industrialization, urbanization, the emancipation of women and the shift of productive activity outside the family structures that create and promote conditions for the family to carry out its main functions? The family, as a fundamental intermediary between the individual, the State and other social institutions, is not being given by senior officials and management organs its proper role, and sometimes the interests of the family are simply ignored.

The next point is that the interests of the family are not taken into account in the determination of the interrelationship between employer and employee. The latter is frequently considered as a work resource, but not as a worker with family obligations. If we correlate this to the objective reality which is characteristic of Russia and, indeed, for many other countries, where both parents in the family are working, this on the one hand is progressive from the point of view of equal opportunity for men and women, but it also requires the adoption of an appropriate policy regarding the responsibility of both parents in bringing up the children and caring for the sick and the elderly, a policy of

equalizing intra-family relations. The State, for its part, must actively help to develop a system of social services and their provision and assure the right and opportunity for their use, as well as the corresponding regimes and guarantees of employment.

Only through such an approach can we talk about real ways of achieving the rights and freedoms of the individual on the principle of the elimination of all forms of discrimination, particularly discrimination against women. Only such an approach can ensure greater participation and the corresponding greater responsibility of women, involving them in the management of resources and in taking decisions at all social levels.

Today we cannot but see the need for a high level of coordination in the role of the United Nations and effective action at the interregional level, particularly for the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Recognizing the high degree of importance of social law as a basis for achieving economic and political cooperation for sustainable development, I feel it necessary and important to strengthen the role of cooperation at the regional level, in this case, the role of the Economic Commission for Europe.

On the basis of the above, and given the importance of the efforts and initiatives of the United Nations and UNICEF in the interests of our children, and of forthcoming events in the area of social policy - the World Summit for Social Development, to be held in March 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 - I am proposing that we declare the period 1995-2005 the Decade of the Family. I propose that we work out a plan of action for this decade that takes into account the reality of achieving evolutionary development and progress, and that defines measures and standards for protecting the fundamental functions of the family and their development and adaptation to the new realities and challenges of life.

The experience of the past decade in improving the status of women and the disabled confirms the rightness of such an approach. Our common efforts at the international and national levels will help us move into the twenty-first century on the basis of the principles of real priority interests of the individual and spiritual and moral

development which to a great extent, is assisted by the family. This is a phenomenon of the progress of the evolutionary development of society and of the individual, who is able to react to the challenges of life on the strength of the principles and ethics of his or her lofty human potential. Achieving this must be the goal of the further historical development of the family's economic, political and social transformations.

Allow me to wish all the participants in the General Assembly every success in achieving these noble goals.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pawan Kumar Bansal, Member of Parliament of India.

Mr. Pawan Kumar Bansal (India): It is most appropriate that we should be celebrating the International Year of the Family this year and addressing related issues in the General Assembly. The International Conference on Population and Development, held recently in Cairo, provides the backdrop for our deliberations.

India believes that the family is the basic building-block of society. Good family values have been able to contain tension, conflict, crime and violence in society, particularly in the young, and have protected to a large degree the rights and safety of children, engendered social compact and responsibility, and directly contributed to the internal peace, growth, stability and harmony of society.

It is of paramount importance that United Nations activities on human rights education should draw upon the best of successful family traditions and values from all societies and promote them around the globe in the interest of more peaceful societies, and the preservation of human rights and social values for all mankind. Individuals have not only rights in society, but responsibilities to society as well, and to the global family as a whole, as is reflected in the ancient Indian concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam", that is, the world is but a family.

India has been implementing active and holistic family-welfare strategies over several decades with positive results. This is based upon the interconnections

of literacy, economic and social development and population control. In India, the family has been the basic unit of stability and integration in a society of free choice. Indian family-welfare programmes are significantly based on voluntary participation.

The Indian Government spends about half a billion dollars annually on its family welfare programme. India's family welfare programme is funded by the central Government. In an effort to impart dynamism to our family-welfare programme, a focused and result-oriented action plan has been developed over the last few years. Some of its key features are: improving the quality and outreach of family-welfare services; developing a mechanism to make funds available to the state governments on the basis of their performance in the reduction of the birth rate; increasing the coverage of younger couples; involving voluntary and non-governmental organizations in a big way to promote active community participation; and evolving higher-level intersectoral coordination mechanisms at the national, state, district and block levels and, most important, at the village level.

India fully accepts the goal of universalizing services for sexual and reproductive health care, of meeting the unmet needs by the year 2015, as envisaged at Cairo, and of removing all programme-related barriers by 2005. We aim to implement the Cairo Programme of Action at the national level, with international cooperation as appropriate and in accordance with the United Nations Charter. However, India expressed reservations on the linking of debt relief with government investment in family and development programmes at the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, since we believe that the implementation of the recommendations of the Cairo Conference on the subject of the family and population is the sovereign right of a State, in consonance with its national laws and development priorities.

In India, we have also realized that development activities undertaken with the active participation of the beneficiaries and the community have a greater chance of success and can be more cost effective. India has benefited from the rich tradition of voluntary action from the beginning of our independence movement under Mahatma Gandhi, and today voluntary and non-governmental groups

play an important and supportive role along with the Government in development activities, including those concerning the welfare of women, particularly at the grass roots.

In India, the term "weaker sections" embraces the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of our population. The Constitution of India recognizes the special needs of these specific groups and makes a number of provisions to protect and promote their interests. It is in this tradition that the constitutional provision on the directive principles of State policy has informed the policy-making of successive Governments in India in order to ensure social justice for all. The disadvantaged sections constitute about 25 per cent of the population. Their development is being pursued through some of the largest affirmative-action programmes in the world in their favour in education, employment and other areas. The Government has also involved non-governmental organizations in the promotion of the economic and social development of the weaker sections.

The disabled constitute about 1.9 per cent of our population. Today, special emphasis is placed by the Government on rehabilitation programmes for slum dwellers, comprehensive legislation for the rights of people with disabilities, and wider education of the disabled. A national programme for developing technologies for the disabled was launched in 1988. We have also set up special employment exchanges and special cells for handicapped persons all over the country.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Prime Minister's New Employment Scheme support training programmes for youth towards self-employment in all Indian states. These programmes provide technical and basic managerial skills as well as loans and subsidies to youth in the age group of 18 to 35 years and to families living below the poverty line, to enable them to become self-employed.

India has registered considerable success in the functioning and development of the cooperative movement in a democratic society. This is acknowledged in the Secretary-General's report on the subject in document A/49/213. We endorse some of the

conclusions of the report: First, cooperative enterprises provide the organizational means by which a significant proportion of humanity is able to take into its own hands the tasks of creating productive employment, overcoming poverty and achieving social integration. Secondly, cooperatives contribute substantially to the common good in market economies, principally by improving the efficiency and quality of the economy, but also by assuring democratization and environmental rationality. Thirdly, an effective working partnership between Governments and cooperative movements might be an important means to allocate and mobilize societal resources effectively. Other conclusions of the report need further study.

Just as the needs of the family, youth, women and the aged are best met in a just, democratic and tolerant society, cohesive, well-knit family traditions, in turn, contribute to the building of such a society. The societies which have overlooked the importance of traditional family values in their pursuit of personal excellence and prosperity are today re-emphasizing the role of the individual within the family. In this International Year of the Family, let us reaffirm our faith in the family as the nucleus of a healthy and orderly society.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Malta, Mr. Joseph Cassar.

Mr. Cassar (Malta): These Meetings of the General Assembly are significant not only because they coincide with the observance of the International Year of the Family, but also, and even more, because they reflect the importance Member States ascribe to the family.

Throughout history, the family has always been considered the basic unit of society. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo again acknowledged and reaffirmed this fact. Malta is honoured to have contributed to the negotiations which ensured that this principle was given the attention it merits in the Conference's final document.

The family is an essential element for secure social development. It provides a source of mutual love, respect, solidarity and affection and acts as a support system for its individual members, encouraging personal growth and respect for individual rights.

The family transmits values from one generation to another and is a powerful agent for social, political and cultural evolution - a primary vehicle for development, industrialization and urbanization. The family, however, is also influenced by the nature and pace of change. It is today subject to numerous pressures that make it extremely vulnerable and thus it requires, more than ever before, the support of other institutions.

The international community's celebration of the International Year of the Family is a long-overdue acknowledgement. In preparation for this International Year of the Family, Malta had the privilege of hosting the United Nations Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting in April 1993 and the World NGO Forum in November 1993. The Valletta Declaration issued by the Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting reaffirmed a wide-ranging commitment to the family and invited the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations and Member States to encourage and support regional cooperation with respect to family matters.

Malta has noted with great interest, and supports, the recommendations of the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family calling for appropriate action to be taken with a view to including family-oriented elements in the work of the Commission on Human Rights. By safeguarding and promoting the values and unity of the family, we further strengthen the protection of human rights.

The Government of Malta believes that the State should concern itself with helping and consolidating the family. It can never be in the true interest of the State to weaken the family unit. The State should support and protect the family and facilitate its role. Such a role requires the safeguarding of human rights, ranging from the equal rights of men and women to social security; from the right to education to the right to life of the unborn child.

In giving its support, the State should not exploit the family in order to ensure a larger or smaller work force. Parents have the exclusive right to plan the size of their family in accordance with their own beliefs and convictions. Decisions of this nature should not be made

under pressure by the State through such methods as limiting the number of children eligible for State subsidies.

Since Malta's independence 30 years ago, successive Governments in Malta have worked to give tangible form to these convictions. The enactment of Act XXI of 1993 by Parliament, after weeks of public discussion, has given a new dimension to family life. The law provides for a concept of marriage based on the recognition of the fundamental principles of equality between the spouses and, necessarily, on their common consent. In marriage and within the family, husband and wife are recognized, in practice and in the eyes of the law, to be equal partners. They are jointly responsible for the care and upbringing of the children and are expected to reach agreement on all matters of importance to family life. The status of women has been enhanced through fundamental changes that give the necessary recognition to the dignity of the person - a dignity shared by all individual members of the family.

The Government of Malta believes that discrimination on the basis of gender should be eliminated in a democratic society. Women should not be discriminated against. They should have the right to decide to work outside the home and have the right to the same remuneration as their male counterparts. The acknowledgement of such rights in no way diminishes the important and significant contribution to society of women who choose to exercise their right to devote all of their time to bringing up their children and looking after the family. For such choices to be truly free, States should promote child day-care services, subsidies for full-time family workers, and retraining opportunities for women who rejoin the work force after an absence of some years.

My Government believes that the family offers the best psychological milieu for stable personality development, as well as the niche where one assimilates moral values and cherished social customs. The family offers its members the basis of a satisfactory and meaningful life. Above all, it provides solidarity to all its members, particularly those with special needs owing to disability, emotional stress or ageing. In this respect, the family, given the necessary support by Government and non-governmental organizations, is the ideal organ for enhancing the chances for persons, whatever their special needs, to remain integrated in society.

In the light of these principles, the Government of Malta strives to support the family rather than to supplant it. Social security is universal, and assistance is provided to the unemployed and to persons without any source of income. Children's and family allowances are granted by the State, and special benefits are available for the chronically ill, the disabled and other marginal groups. An allowance is given to persons who give up employment to care for a disabled or an elderly relative. Pensions for the elderly and the disabled provide adequate financial income to ensure integration. These benefits, together with universal health care, help foster solidarity and diminish that stress which persons with special needs exert on the family.

Protection and assistance help the family to fully assume its responsibility as the basic unit of society. As the natural environment for children and youth, and the most desirable support system for the elderly and the disabled, the strengthening of the family should be given priority by national Governments, intergovernmental organizations and concerned non-governmental organizations.

In recent years, the family and social change have been the subject of considerable discussion in Malta. The family has become smaller but remains strong and strategic in the social structure of our community. Its strength has helped it evolve and respond to various economic, social and psychological pressures. The Government and non-governmental organizations, in supporting the family, emphasize preventive measures such as counselling before and during marriage. In cases of marital breakdown, hostel facilities and accommodation at affordable rents are provided whenever possible. Residential facilities are available for children taken in care, but in this respect fostering is preferred to long-term institutionalization.

During the past 30 years, economic development and the increasing level of employment have been instrumental in raising the standard of living. This process has been further strengthened by free and universal access to education at all levels.

Drug abuse is a cause of concern. The welfare services, in close cooperation with the health authorities,

the police and the Catholic non-governmental organization Caritas, provide comprehensive counselling, detoxification services and programmes aimed at overcoming the problem and encouraging full integration.

In major international instruments, the United Nations and the international community have proclaimed the inalienable and fundamental human rights of persons and have repeatedly declared that the family, as the basic unit of society, is entitled to protection by society and the State. These abundant references to the family should be embodied in a coherent and comprehensive document on the functions, responsibilities and rights of the family. Such an international document on the family would have a direct impact on its members and on the role of the family in society. It would further rather than preclude the protection of the rights of the family and of its individual members.

That is why my Government believes that in the follow-up to this Year of the Family, we should harmonize our efforts to consolidate peace and democracy with efforts to promote social justice on a global scale. Families can realize their full potential only in a world where peace and freedom prevail and in a just society free from inequities. Poverty, hunger, illiteracy, racial discrimination, the degradation of the environment, armed conflict and other calamities greatly impede the normal development of the family in vast areas of the world.

Political and economic instability have uprooted millions from their homes. In a spirit of international solidarity, many States have welcomed the victims of these modern-day scourges. It is hoped that in such instances family reunification will be given the importance it deserves.

Subsidiarity is a key principle of contemporary society. Our efforts to bring decision-making close to those most affected by it should find immediate resonance in matters which have a direct impact on the family. Believing as we do that the family is the basic unit of society, we should strive to fortify its protection and support. The erosion of the family as an institution cannot but result in fissures which threaten the stability of those very societies which we cherish most.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I should like to inform the Assembly that the representative of Brazil has requested to be allowed to participate in the debate on this agenda item, although the list of speakers was closed yesterday morning.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides to allow the name of the delegation of Brazil to be included in the list of speakers.

It was so decided.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan, Mr. Shunji Maruyama.

Mr. Maruyama (Japan): Before commencing my remarks, I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Henryk J. Sokalski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, for his excellent work in promoting observance of the Year.

It is universally recognized that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and that it assumes diverse forms and functions which reflect the diversity of individual preferences and social conditions. It acts as a leading agent in promoting the well-being of the larger social entities that are built on it, and it thus plays a critical role in social development. Everywhere, the family provides both physical and spiritual support for its members, and particularly for those who are most vulnerable, such as children, working adults, and the aged. Our common principles and values - human dignity, equality, respect, mutual responsibility and cooperation - are first shaped and nurtured in the family.

Bearing all this in mind, the Government of Japan is in full accord with the objectives of the International Year of the Family, which provides Member States with an excellent opportunity to re-evaluate and promote the family's unique role and functions in various aspects of our life. The Year is an occasion to promote the concept of the family as the smallest working democracy, one that operates at the very heart of society.

Japan welcomes the vast array of initiatives undertaken by Member States in support of families, and,

for its part, it is carrying out a number of public-information activities in observance of the Year. Among the events organized by the Government of Japan are seminars and concerts, and the issuance of special commemorative stamps. Local governments and non-governmental organizations are also making important contributions in promoting the role and functions of the family in bringing about social progress.

These activities help the people understand the objectives of the International Year of the Family, one of which is the creation of a society of equals that gives special priorities to the needs of the vulnerable. My country attaches particular importance to promoting policies and measures that contribute to a more equal partnership between men and women and, in particular, an equal sharing of family responsibilities. This is especially important in the light of the trend towards smaller families in Japan, which often diminishes the ability of the basic social group to care for its members, particularly children, the disabled and the elderly. I would like to take this opportunity to announce that in April of this commemorative Year Japan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child as part of its effort to address such concerns.

This series of plenary meetings of the General Assembly has given us an invaluable opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the various policies and programmes being adopted and executed by other Member States. The many examples we have heard of the success of these efforts spur us to make further efforts of our own. My delegation believes that in following up the Year we should pay greater attention to the family in the national policies we formulate. It is imperative that our policies be based on respect for the individual, rather than focusing on the family as a whole.

The pivotal role of the family in the development process will be a key issue at the upcoming World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. These high-level forums can make an invaluable contribution to ensuring the success of the Year and an effective follow-up to it. As we come to the end of the International Year of the Family we should remain active in promoting the inherent strength of the family and in strengthening its role and functions in contributing to

national, regional, and international sustainable development.

Mrs. Sirelkhtim (Sudan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, Mr. N. H. Biegan.

Mr. Biegan (Netherlands): In the Netherlands, the working definition of a family is "a living unit in which the care and the upbringing of the child takes place". We attach great importance to the breadth of this definition and to the concept of "living unit". Government policies and specific measures may affect these living units, but they are not focused on or geared to families as such. They focus on the individual citizens, and particularly the children, belonging to the families, or the living units.

As has been stated on earlier occasions, the Government of the Netherlands, because of this national policy, was at first somewhat reluctant to accept the idea of an International Year of the Family. However, the Netherlands Government ultimately decided to join in the preparations, and it established an independent National Committee provided with a substantial Government subsidy and corporate sponsorship.

Special attention has been given to a number of activities and projects in fields such as living units in which there are young children, focusing on people in socially deprived conditions and people in "special" circumstances; assisting migrant living units in the process of integration into Netherlands society, using specially designed methods to educate very young children and their mothers; enhancing the equality of the various living units in the Netherlands, based on cultural, religious and personal preferences; and finally, consciousness-raising, in particular raising the consciousness of fathers.

Hence, after this somewhat hesitant start, the year of the family in the Netherlands has provided a basis for socially relevant activities and projects. The Netherlands National Committee participated actively in the closing

conference of the International Year of the Family in Montreal last week, with a view to fostering acceptance and recognition of alternative family arrangements. Two international congresses, in October and November, will supplement this development, one on "Children on the Move", dealing with the situation of abducted, adopted and refugee children, the other with single-parent families.

Please allow me to explain, briefly, the Netherlands' position and to elucidate what we consider to be "a family". The family concept as such generally implies a variety of notions. While the Netherlands recognizes the family as a basic unit of society, we also recognize the diversity of family life, lifestyles and structures within and between societies. This diversity has been confirmed by findings of the World Economic Survey, which states that at present about 35 per cent of all households worldwide are run by women. Government policy in the Netherlands is therefore geared to individuals in all their various situations. This includes families, comparable social units and those who do not live in a family. We wish to underline that in our society, apart from the traditional family comprising a married father and mother and their children, other forms of living together also exist: for example, single-parent units - mostly only a mother with her children - and unmarried individuals who live together, of opposite sexes or of the same sex.

In our opinion, it is not for a government to hand down a judgement regarding these various forms of living together. The government should focus on the upbringing and education of children. In our opinion, children should be the focus of our attention, whether they are living at home or have left home but remain dependent - for example those who, because of their studies or for various other reasons, are temporarily away from home - or, of course, are homeless. Because its policy is focused on children rather than on the family as such, the Netherlands does not have anything like a family policy, which makes it difficult for us to go along with international positions regarding such policies. They just do not apply to the situation in the Netherlands.

In a worldwide context, family structures, traditions and values differ so markedly that it seems unlikely that international consultations on family matters could result in widely applicable international measures to strengthen

family life. The Netherlands Government is concerned that a debate at the global level could become value-laden and might specifically be used to promote negative views about, or even bias and discrimination against, types of households other than the traditional nuclear family.

In closing, let me stress that we feel very strongly that attention to families in all their varieties should never lead to diminished attention to the rights of the individual. In the end, all living units are composed of individuals, and it is respect for the rights and dignity of the individual that can promote greater understanding between people, nations and cultures.

The President: (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on Mr. José Bernard Pallais Arana, the Vice Minister for Foreign Relations of Nicaragua.

Mr. Pallais Arana (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The staggering changes taking place on the international scene affect the scope of relations between States themselves as well as relationships among social groups, which within those societies have their separate identities, lifestyles and cultures. The family, commonly regarded as the basic unit of society and the focus of the social organization network, is undergoing a rapid process of change, which in some societies is affecting the very concept of the family. The Cairo Conference reaffirmed the concept of the family as a natural and fundamental nucleus of society.

The acute needs stemming from the demands of development, economic growth, structural adjustments and extreme poverty have all had an effect on the structure of the family, leading to the mass incorporation of women into the labour market, changing the relations between the sexes, thereby having an impact on the size of families and giving rise to an increase in early motherhood and the breakdown of marriages. In countries where conflicts have taken on a dimension of social violence, families have been affected by forced separation, displacement and family disintegration. In all these cases children are affected the most.

Our country took an active part in the regional Latin American-Caribbean preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family, organized by the

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and on that occasion we adopted the Cartagena Declaration and the regional proposal for the preparation of courses of action to assist the families of Latin America and the Caribbean.

That Declaration recognized the complex processes of change taking place in the institution of the family in Latin America and the Caribbean; the close relationships between the family and the processes of democratization and peace; the importance that cooperation among the countries of the region and support from international agencies and non-governmental organizations has for the policies, plans and programmes in support of families.

We are certain that the agreements reflected in that Declaration and in the regional proposal will help to strengthen the family as a leading actor in providing for its own well-being; will promote its integration in relations of equity, solidarity, cooperation, affection and respect; and will foster broad-ranging and responsible concerted action between the Government and society for the overall benefit of the family.

In the governmental programme outlined by Her Excellency President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, there is a clear statement of political resolve to direct resources to the full ethical, economic and social recovery of the Nicaraguan nuclear family, after a decade of political and military conflict.

The family passes on values and rules of behaviour and plays an important role in economic, political, social and cultural aspects of society. It is the smallest social area for interaction on a day-to-day basis and for the enhancement of the well-being of the individual.

Traditionally, the Nicaraguan family has assigned different roles to men and women; however, this situation has changed as a result of socio-economic factors that have arisen in recent decades and have led to growing participation by women in economic activity, thus leading to a redefinition of the roles of men and women.

Nicaragua's political Constitution stipulates that the family is the fundamental nucleus of society and has a right to the protection of society and the State and to the

safeguarding of its rights. The present Constitution, and the laws adopted under the Constitution, provide for the rights of the family.

President Chamorro has paid particular attention to the restoration of the moral principles and values of the Nicaraguan family, to the promotion of respect within the family unit and, above all, to the promotion of family unity as the primary foundation of society and a fundamental factor in national reconciliation. The Government of Nicaragua is today determined to conserve such basic values of the Nicaraguan family as solidarity among family members and, above all, the family's educational function as a transmitter of moral and civic values.

In carrying out the objectives of the International Year of the Family the Government of Nicaragua has set up a National Commission for the International Year of the Family, with the participation of representatives from various State Ministries, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The social cabinet entrusted the National Commission with specific duties, including the preparation of a preliminary draft family code to consolidate and update existing legislation, the dissemination of the goals of the International Year of the Family at the national and international levels and the performance of activities designed to promote family integration in the community.

The process of curricular change being carried out by the Ministry of Education has placed special emphasis on the promotion of family values as the basic axis of human development and democratic life. Since 1993 parents have been actively participating in that Ministry's consultative councils and in schools and institutes at the basic-education level.

One of the main functions of the Nicaraguan Institute for Women is the protection of women in the family and society in an attempt to integrate them, on an equal footing, into the country's economic and social relationships, with special emphasis on the overall health of women and children.

At the same time, the programmes of the Ministry of Health dedicated to so-called reproductive health place special emphasis on promoting women's self-esteem and on strengthening the family nucleus and unit. The Ministry of Health, in an effort to improve the population's quality of life, has introduced profound changes in the organization and the provision of services. Management has been made more democratic through community participation by the creation of departmental health councils, which have had a decisive impact on the organization of services and their effectiveness.

Similarly, the policies of the Ministry of Labour have attempted to guarantee a minimum wage to workers free from gender-based discrimination, in keeping with the basic needs of the average Nicaraguan family and urban and rural labour demands. The Ministry has also tried to achieve collective agreements and compacts to guarantee incentives such as accident insurance, supplements based on seniority, maternity protection and indemnity based on seniority at the end of the labour contract. Further, the Nicaraguan Institute for Agrarian Reforms is proceeding to assign crop-land titles to families in order to promote the preservation of family heritage, thus maintaining family unity.

But above and beyond the International Year, the family is the principal focus of the Chamorro Government's policy of national reconciliation. We believe that peace is a process that must begin in the Nicaraguan family, a family that has been divided by a decade of wars and antagonisms of all kinds. We believe that we have taken a significant step along this arduous path and that our achievements will be irreversible.

The President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Reaz Rahman, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): Five years ago the Assembly decided to proclaim the year 1994 the International Year of the Family. Since then, concentrated preparatory work has been undertaken by Governments, the United Nations Secretariat, specialized agencies, regional Commissions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to give substance to the importance of the family and to highlight awareness of it on the part of

policy-makers and the public - the family not only as the basic unit of social life but as a key motivator for promoting environmental supportive growth, societal justice, democracy and human rights at all levels of society. We would like to pay a special tribute to President Amara Essy for his opening address and to the Secretary-General for comprehensively outlining the steps taken to project this issue now and in the future.

In launching the International Year of the Family and declaring 15 May as the annual International Day of Families, the international community seeks to highlight the need for continuity in promoting implementation and follow-up measures that will keep the basic notion of the family in the foreground and the family's importance as a crucial agent in and beneficiary of the development process and as an essential nucleus in society for generating moral and ethical values.

Several key perceptions have emerged that are gaining widespread recognition and that need to be further encouraged and strengthened. First and foremost, there is the perception that major instruments of the United Nations, be they on human rights or on the evolution of social policies or global programmes of action on development, are increasingly being centred on the human being and are, in turn, calling for the widest possible protection and assistance to be accorded to the family. A second fundamental element is gender equality, women's equal participation in employment, shared parental responsibility and the significance of the rights of children. Third is the recognition that, despite diversity in the various concepts of the family in different social, cultural and political systems, there are many common elements in the problems faced by families in all parts of the world. Perhaps most important is the growing awareness, as the President of the General Assembly pointed out, that

"social policies must respond to holistic, family-centred principles." (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Plenary Meeting, 35th meeting, [p. 8]*)

Indeed, the resolution adopted by the Assembly at its forty-seventh session expressed awareness that families are the fullest reflection, at the grass-roots level, of the

strengths and weaknesses of the social and developmental welfare environment and as such offer a uniquely comprehensive and synthesizing approach to social issues.

Today, the basic challenge facing us is to bolster the position of families as a major catalyst for social progress and development and to reinforce their role as the key nucleus for promoting moral and ethical values, education, rights and responsibilities and the fundamental foundation for democracy. If the impressive achievements of the International Year of the Family are to have any last effect, a crucial imperative will be to consolidate and implement follow-up actions to the goals we have set together.

Bangladesh has been attaching due importance to the observance of the Year and to looking beyond it. A broad array of activities have been undertaken to celebrate it. These include a series of constructive activities befitting families across the country. Emphasis on gender equality in society and in the family has been an additional factor in the creation of a greater awareness of the role of individual members within this the basic unit of society.

A major target that has been reached is unanimous recognition of the role of families in fostering sustained growth and sustainable development. Bangladesh's Department of Social Services is implementing a number of programmes, both in urban and in rural areas, to ensure balanced socio-economic development of families. Emphasis is being laid on both moral and material family development. The areas of this development include health, sanitation, education, the skills required for self-employment, and recreation.

Families are truly the building-blocks of societies and the essential fabric of human relationships. We are deeply committed to appropriately supporting and sustaining families as the means of providing a better future for our children and as a fundamental social unit to strengthen the local community, national society and the global community.

The President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I call on the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein, Mrs. Claudia Fritsche.

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): In the past, families have often been defined as the "smallest democracy at the heart of societies". When the International Year of the Family was being launched, it was affirmed that families as the fundamental group units of society are entitled to maximum protection and assistance to enable them to fulfil their roles in ensuring the development of their individual members and of society.

Ideally, families are the primary source of nurturing and care. They transmit values and culture and form an oasis in a competitive world. Families continue to be the primary caring institutions. They look after members who are young or elderly, ill or disabled. It is through the family that children acquire the knowledge and skills that will serve them as adults.

There is no simple view of the family, and no easy definition of family policy. To some degree, all policies affect families. Yet, policies and programmes tend to be based on concepts and family models which, because of the major changes that most societies have undergone in recent decades, may no longer reflect reality.

The traditional forms of family are changing. Improvements in communication and access to information enable individual family members to have increased contact with ideas and behavioural norms that go beyond their traditional spheres. Economic factors force families to separate when members migrate in search of employment. Within a relatively short time, extended families have shrunk, and single-parent families are no longer the exception. Today, between a quarter and a third of all households worldwide are headed by single parents, of whom 90 per cent are women. One of the most demanding aspects of the daily lives of many families, especially single-parent and female-headed families, is the constant need to balance work and familial responsibilities. There is a great need for social-support systems appropriate to individual cases.

One of the major objectives of the International Year is the achievement of gender equity in the family, which entails the equal sharing of responsibilities. The sharing of roles by men and women requires new perspectives and patterns of partnership. It therefore seems necessary that major attention be given to

examining and fostering new roles and responsibilities for men. Fathers could be given wider access to education in family life, and parental leave and other incentives could be provided, to encourage and enable them to play new, wider roles, especially with regard to home-making, child care and family planning. Affected as they are by continuing social, economic, cultural and political pressures, women should be enabled to explore new opportunities for education and employment and to balance work and familial responsibilities.

Families are valuable resources for the prevention of crime and delinquency. An important issue is the prevention of domestic violence. Violence against women and children is pervasive and affects families everywhere and in all social classes. Women experience violence as a form of control that limits their ability to pursue options in almost every area of life. It hinders the human development of women themselves, and it affects the well-being of children and families.

We welcome the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. This is one of the most important results of the World Conference on Human Rights, which took place in Vienna last year. In agreeing to appoint a Special Rapporteur, the Conference recognized gender-based violence in both public and private spheres as a human-rights violation.

The activities instituted by the Liechtenstein National Coordinating Committee for the International Year of the Family were based on the following considerations. Changes in human lives, and particularly in family life, are associated with intense emotional and social experiences; in living through these changes, awareness is beneficial to both the personality and the community, and, accordingly, can mitigate or even prevent the emergence of psychological and social problems, such as impoverishment, addiction and suicidal tendencies; ensuring the means of existence, raising children and partnership are just a few of the many tasks a family has to cope with; families are psychologically and socially overburdened and, accordingly, require support and assistance.

One of the key considerations in the implementation of the planned activities in Liechtenstein was that the

family is where the changes occur and that the implementation of measures in support of the home and of the family should not lead to State control of the family. In creating family-support infrastructures, the State and its institutions are only the backdrop. The stage on which the action takes place is the family itself. Supportive action should be something shared, something creative and innovative.

It was against this background that a programme for the provision of assistance to families in times of crisis and periods of transition was initiated. Further programmes focus on drug addiction within the family, sexual exploitation of children, current problems in the field of education, and crisis management within the family.

It has been said frequently that the family, being the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is the fullest reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of a community. In spite of the many changes in society that have influenced its role, the family continues to provide the natural framework for the emotional and material support that is essential to the growth and development of its members. A strong and democratic family should be promoted as an important element of an equally strong and democratic society.

The President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation wishes to begin its remarks by acknowledging and endorsing the rationale of the General Assembly's unanimous proclamation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family - a Year to instill a global conviction to employ intensified action and international cooperation on behalf of families in order to advance social progress and development.

The family, as the most fundamental institution for human growth and happiness, has, in recent decades, been threatened by structural and cultural transformations in Western societies. The intrusion of the market approach into everyday life has severely weakened the belief and practices which were common in family,

religious and local communities. Such new processes have created serious moral problems rather than technical ones.

As modernism proceeds, strong ties in traditional communities become weaker and weaker, while the need to care for each other grows stronger and stronger. Thus, we are in a paradoxical situation: to become more modern leads to a reliance on the market and bureaucracy, which contributes to the destruction of modernism itself. To solve this dilemma, we must attach utmost importance to the family, education and religion. Through this restructuring of everyday life and of social systems we can create a proper balance between moral obligation and individual freedom. It is very sad that in the current situation the foundation of the family has become so weak that individual autonomy has replaced moral and social responsibility. Accordingly, narrow individualism, which dramatically focuses on immediate personal affairs, is continuously developing at the cost of public happiness and social coherence. It is unfortunate that the mass media, in their competition in the market of popular art and culture, are provoking utilitarian and hedonistic individualism, by dramatizing immediate desire, emotional fantasies and trivial concerns.

Such maximization of self-interest, accompanied by the increasing attachment to the comforts of life, has led to the dissolution of social ties and family relations. These tragic changes in Western societies have resulted in a high proportion of divorce - almost one out of two marriages - widespread reluctance to marry, and an increasing acceptance of premarital and extra-marital sexual relations. Worse still, the spread of sexual abuse within the family and domestic violence have brought about an increasing number of runaways and crimes.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has, since its inception, made every effort to create a conducive and encouraging environment for families to flourish in. Articles 10, 21, 29, 30 31 and 43 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran frame laws, regulations and national plans connected with families and their stability. These constitutional provisions are based on the principles of the Islamic law and code of conduct.

Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran regards the family as the core of society and supports any movement that

contributes to its strengthening and enhancement. Declaring 1994 the International Year of the Family emphasized the need for more intense attention to and a thorough re-evaluation of existing difficulties faced by families in the world.

The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the initiatives launched by the International Year of the Family because it believes in the need for expanding collective efforts to eliminate common problems. We have participated wholeheartedly and actively in these activities. The first step was the formation of a national committee comprising various organizations within the country. These organizations manage the affairs of children, women, youth, the elderly and the disabled. The many sessions held by this committee resulted in the compilation of a national report.

Specific examples of Iran's initiatives this year include a review of the Family Protection Law with help from the Office of Women's Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund in Tehran; the art competition staged by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for children in refugee camps; the construction of libraries at refugee camps in a collaborative effort between the UNHCR and the Ministry of the Interior; the implementation of a nationwide immunization of children against polio by the Ministry of Health; the mobilization of the mass media to promote the International Year of the Family; the convening of a regional conference on family issues held with the cooperation of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities; the convening of youth seminars on marriage and the family and the Parents and Teachers Conference on the International Year of the Family.

The International Year of the Family is an opportunity to inform everyone of what countries have done or intend to do to reinforce and strengthen the family institution. Here is the opportune moment to share the fruits of our labour, our insights into difficulties, and our successful solutions. Without a doubt, enhanced regional and international cooperation in matters relating to the family and the preparation and implementation of proposals and plans to align socio-economic development

with family interests will open the way for future cooperation in similar endeavours.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.



General Assembly

Forty-ninth Session

38th Meeting

Wednesday, 19 October 1994, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Essy (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 95 (continued)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call on the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations, Ambassador Fernando Guillen Salas.

Mr. Guillen (Peru) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset allow me to express our support for the statement made by the Ambassador of Paraguay on behalf of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

We have come here today to reaffirm the importance of the family as the basic building-block of society, the social group in which the human person is reproduced. We wish to stress the fact that the family plays the important role of giving society new members who can play an appropriate and constructive part in its social activities. Thanks to the family, societies are renewed and transmit their special characteristics from one generation to the next. It is the family that passes on the culture, and the history, thereby ensuring the continuity of a people.

There is a world-wide crisis of values. In Peru the danger of social disintegration has been aggravated by a

prolonged socio-economic crisis, which, fortunately, is being overcome. There have been other causes also — demographic problems, migratory phenomena and urban sprawl. All of these factors have a negative effect on the harmonious development of the family and tend to its breakdown.

The extreme poverty suffered by most of our population, which is related to the lack of basic services, is a factor that threatens the family. It deserves particular attention because it increases the vulnerability of the most vulnerable sectors, particularly women and children.

Two decades of terrorist violence and drug trafficking and the corruption ensuing therefrom, have also contributed seriously to the breakdown of the family. For that reason we Peruvians enthusiastically hail the national victory over terrorism and the Government's resolution to combat drug trafficking.

At this stage of its history, Peruvian society, which is multicultural, is becoming more closely knit and is acquiring a greater degree of communication, all of which will help to define the image of the new Peruvian citizen. This will eventually bring about the integration of the two most important cultural currents underlying a society that is the oldest of all in South America. These two formative cultural influences share the belief in the intrinsic value of the family for society.

The present effort being carried out by Peru in support of the family and its essential role in the integral

development of the human person and in the development of the country as a whole can be divided into two areas of action.

In the sectoral area, I wish to mention in particular the following initiatives: programmes for health care, with emphasis on the care of mothers and children through pre- and post-natal monitoring programmes, breast-feeding, monitoring of the growth and development of the child, and vaccination campaigns, among others; educational programmes with special attention to helping working mothers by setting up the national programme of *wawa wasis* — children's homes — and the integrated programme of education for life; food-support programmes through the "glass-of-milk programme" which seeks to provide children and expectant and nursing mothers with the nutritional supplements that they need; constitutional recognition of the importance of the family as the building-block of society, and an up-to-date set of legal regulations that is in conformity with reality, the institution of the family, matrimony, cohabitation and the rights that arise from the inheritance laws, legal measures for the protection of the family, and regulations governing family property, among others; a broad-based programme focusing on basic multisector social expenditure that gives priority to intervention in favour of the neediest families in rural areas and in the marginal city areas, improving the quality of coverage and the efficiency of basic social expenditure for services in education, basic justice, health, and supplementary nutrition; and the programme of support for revitalization of the population in the poorest areas of the country.

As regards institutions, I wish to emphasize the following basic ideas and initiatives carried out by the National Institute for Family Welfare.

The main goal of the Institute is to strengthen the family, fostering the development and improvement of conditions for the family, ensuring its integrated development in a climate of harmony, respect for the culture and the values of each group of people, and accepting the challenge of providing them with training to give them the capacity to become useful beings for society and for themselves.

The Institute has as its premise the idea that neither violence nor poverty can justify the breakdown of family ties, which are the sole guarantee of the training of responsible adults who can play a useful part in society. Similarly, it is aware that Peruvian families are carrying out new forms of survival through self-management

organizations that enable them to face the social, economic and moral crisis in a spirit of solidarity, playing the leading role that is theirs within the process of social change. In regard to this group, special mention should be made of the active role played by Peruvian women in the struggle to improve living conditions and chances of survival in the poorest sectors of the country.

Combining family well-being and active participation by the community, the Institute works on the basis of two programmatic approaches.

First, there is the furtherance of social welfare directed towards the carrying out of preventive and promotional programmes, giving priority to the value of the family as the initial formative force in the development of the human person, emphasizing services for minors, the elderly, the family and the community, and promoting active organized participation by its members.

Secondly, there is the programmatic aspect of the social integration of children and adolescents who are in especially difficult circumstances. Special attention is directed towards the problems of children and adolescents from birth to 18 years of age in cases where they have difficulties in achieving integrated development because of bio-psycho-social deficiencies. These are minors who have been abandoned, who are in moral danger, who have behavioural problems or who are on the fringes of the law. Basic clothing, housing and health care are provided to all of them as well as psychological assistance, socio-familial, behavioural, educational and specialized labour assistance. An effort is being made to help them adopt acceptable patterns of social behaviour so that they can become reintegrated into society and the family.

Peru is taking resolute action to resolve the urgent problems of its population. The consolidation of democracy and progress in economic restructuring, the recovery of peace and growth now make it possible for my country to give social problems, and within social problems the strengthening of the family, the priority that they deserve. I wish to emphasize along these lines that we are seeking the implementation of a holistic approach that articulates economic, social and pacification policies in a rational way.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on Her Excellency, Mrs. Miriam Sirelkhatim, State Minister, Ministry of Social Planning of the Sudan.

Mrs. Sirelkhatim (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): From a homeland where family values reign, I should like to greet you, Mr. President, on behalf of Sudan, its people and its Government. I should like to hail the interest accorded by the international community to the family, as reflected by the holding of this meeting at such a high level of representation in this international forum.

The family is the nucleus of society and its solid foundation. It is the ideal environment for character-building. We think that the family is useful to the extent that it follows moral criteria for selecting spouses on the basis of piety and love between the spouses. The two spouses should educate their children on the basis of piety, without discriminating in any way between girls and boys, so that they may grow up imbued with positive moral values, proper behaviour and generosity.

Social and moral values should be inculcated in children, who should be given opportunities for proper interaction with their entire environment, beginning with their parents and including their neighbours and society as a whole. They should also receive a proper education and enjoy a happy childhood as members of society and in their immediate environment. They should, then, be aware of the society that surrounds them and respect it through, for example, acquiring a love of art and beauty. Children should also understand the munificence of the universe and the importance for human beings of following the proper path and preserving the environment, as well as the need to love their work, their neighbour and their homeland.

Children should be brought up to have a positive attitude towards all humanity and should be imbued with a spirit of sacrifice and generosity. Open-minded dialogue and social interaction should help them follow the path of righteousness and avoid evil. They should accept diversity and differences of opinion, and they should be generous. These are also values which they should be taught to acquire.

In Sudan we are proud of our social cohesion and social interdependence. The family enjoys a special place in our society, which is characterized by relatively large families. The State treats the family as part of its national and comprehensive strategy. Furthermore, the Ministry for Social Planning was created in order to develop society on the basis of a global concept. It is the largest Ministry in Sudan.

In addition, family councils have been set up with the aim of helping couples who wish to get married to obtain

the necessary resources, for example, through communal marriages ceremonies. Special councils have been set up in order to organize such communal marriage ceremonies.

In 1994, the Sudanese State attached great importance to the celebration of the International Year of the Family, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/237. In this connection, the Minister for Social Planning issued ministerial decree number 21 of 1994 to create a national committee under the chairmanship of the Minister of State for Social Planning within the framework of the International Year's official celebration. The committee's functions include providing for the protection of the family, ensuring social justice and cohesion and securing prosperity of our citizens on the basis of full respect for their economic and social rights. The committee is also concerned with the protection of the child.

Rural and immigrant families also receive enjoy special assistance. Special training programmes for the women of such families have been introduced. It is hoped that, on 31 October 1994, there will be a special colloquium in Khartoum on the social and human aspects of the Sudanese family.

As part of the interest shown in the family, vulnerable families and orphans are cared for by the State. A ministerial decree has been issued on the provision of assistance to orphans and their mothers. General guidelines have been laid down accordingly in order, *inter alia*, to develop the means of funding, data and statistics gathering and reviewing existing legislation. The Sudanese State has undertaken an ambitious plan of protection that covers children who live in precarious circumstances, especially those of refugees. Medical assistance and education are given to these children. In this regard, I should like to appeal to the international community to provide the necessary assistance so that those children who have been kidnapped by the rebel movement might be able to return to Sudan and to their families. Those children were in fact taken away by force. We would like to appeal to the international community to condemn these acts.

A council for productive families has been set up to assist such families. The council helps those families to market their products and, thereby to improve their standard of living. The high-level committee for productive families has held intensive meetings, and 300

million Sudanese pounds have been allocated to projects for families involved in production.

The Sudanese Government has declared the year 1994 the year for providing all families with clothing. To this end, a special committee has been set up by a presidential decree. The Sudanese people at large have been urged to give their unwanted clothes to the needy. The committee has begun its work under the chairmanship of the President's Office of the Republic, the speaker of the National Assembly and various federal ministers. The Committee has done very good work so far and has provided a large number of people with much-needed clothing under the slogan: "Clothing for All".

The special attention my country devotes to women, has ensured for women the enjoyment of the same political rights, education and medical care as men. Salaries are equal for equal work. Women have also achieved high-level status within government. Sixty-five per cent of girls receive an education, in the context of our interest in women as spouses and mothers.

As to education, my country has focused on the eradication of illiteracy. In the western part of the country, we have achieved a 100 per cent literacy rate. University education is also expanding on a large scale. As to medical services and family planning, campaigns have been launched, especially in rural areas, to distribute medicine to children and pregnant women. Meetings and campaigns have been organized on health care for women and families. I am particularly proud to state that my country has been commended by the United Nations Children's Fund for its vaccination campaign, in which 85 per cent of our children have been immunized.

As to the protection of the environment, the Sudanese State is developing alternative energy resources and making it possible for families to earn a living without damaging the environment. For example, the use of solar cooking is being encouraged.

The handicapped also enjoy special attention from the Sudanese Government. They enjoy all rights without discrimination. In spite of the limited resources at the disposal of the State, opportunities for education and professional training are provided and we hope that international assistance will increase, and this makes it possible for the disabled to be fully reintegrated into society. The State is making a particular effort to provide vaccines, especially against polio. As a result, there has been a considerable reduction in the number of victims of

that crippling disease. With a view to protecting the family, the Sudanese State has raised the slogan of "sports for all", so that all citizens may lead a healthy life. The elderly, for their part, are protected by the Sudanese State and enjoy great respect in our society, especially as our religion urges us to respect our elders, as well as our neighbours, the poor, orphans and the disinherited.

As we celebrate the International Year of the Family, we hope that we are laying the foundations for a united family, the building block of tomorrow's society. We must imbue our families with moral values and abolish social discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity or culture. Moral values ensure the cohesion of society and should be consolidated. Social protection for all should be ensured through education, rehabilitation, medical services, clothing, food and proper housing. We cannot achieve this without an international commitment to these objectives. We are proud to propose the idea of a productive family, which would contribute to solving the problem of poverty in the world. It is with great pride that we propose the moral values of Sudan as the best model for families throughout the world.

Programme of work

The President (*interpretation from French*): I should like to inform representatives that draft resolution A/49/L.5, entitled "Twenty-fifth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Population Fund" has been circulated in the Hall this afternoon and will be considered tomorrow, Thursday, 20 October, in the morning.

I should also like to inform delegations that on Friday, 21 October 1994, in the morning, the Assembly will consider agenda item 21, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of American States", agenda item 29, "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Latin American Economic System", and sub-item (b) of agenda item 16, "Election of seven members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination".

In the afternoon the Assembly will hold the debate on agenda item 89(d), "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa".

Agenda item 95 (continued)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call next on the representative of Pakistan, Mr. Jan Ali Junejo.

Mr. Junejo (Pakistan): Pakistan welcomes the holding of the International Conference on Families. We convey our appreciation to the secretariat of the International Year of the Family for making the Year a success. This Conference provides us with an opportunity to review the activities of the International Year of the Family and to discuss ways and means of putting together a comprehensive and cohesive programme for follow-up to the Year.

All United Nations instruments refer to the family as the basic unit of society. It therefore has a key role in making or unmaking a society or defining its strengths and weaknesses. It is the responsibility of Governments to protect and assist families and to promote their inherent strengths to enable them to function as self-reliant and self-sustaining units in communities and nations. The International Bill of Human Rights provides an excellent framework for achieving these objectives.

The centrality of the family to the development of the human individual was one of the themes highlighted by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in her statement at the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo recently. The Prime Minister stressed:

"The traditional family is the basic unit on which any society rests. It is the anchor on which the individual relies as he embarks upon the journey of life. Islam aims at harmonious lives built upon a bedrock of conjugal fidelity and parental responsibility."

We should underscore the critical need for the family to receive comprehensive support and protection.

The Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development has reiterated the importance of the family in society. Principle 9 and chapter V of that Programme deal not only with the definition of the family but also with issues such as the effect on the family unit of greater participation by

women in the labour force; widespread migration; and forced population shifts caused by violent conflict or war, urbanization, poverty, natural disasters or other causes of displacement. In our deliberations today we should build upon the international consensus on these issues.

The objectives of the International Year of the Family have also received substantive support from the World Conference on Human Rights. The final document adopted by the human rights Conference addressed individual human rights in the context of family relationships and emphasized the positive role that families can play in the promotion and protection of human rights.

We should maintain the momentum generated by those Conferences and by the activities held in observance of the International Year of the Family. The forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders and the Fourth World Conference on Women all present valuable opportunities for placing the role of the family in its rightful context. We should strengthen the family-related components of the declarations and programmes of action of those conferences. At the World Summit for Social Development, we should try to build consensus for generating additional resources to eradicate the poverty and unemployment affecting the poorest families in the world.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his message on the occasion of the launching of the Year, pointed out that families had only recently become the focus of international attention, both as major agents and as beneficiaries of sustainable development. When we look back, we note with satisfaction that observance of the International Year of the Family has achieved considerable progress in enhancing awareness of family issues among Governments and all other actors of civil society. During the Year, special attention has been paid to the economic, social and demographic factors affecting families. However, the more important and difficult tasks of strengthening national institutions and international cooperation to address and solve these problems require consistent, resolute and coherent efforts.

Today, families all over the world are experiencing considerable change. In the developed countries, the civilization of the post-industrial era is searching for appropriate models for the family. In the developing countries, the main problem is the survival of the

majority of families, who live below the poverty line. The deteriorating economic situation in the poor countries, migration, urbanization and population growth have created serious material and spiritual crises for the family. Constantly changing economic and social structures have thrown up new challenges that are beyond the capacity of traditional systems. The families affected need the help of their Governments and of the international community.

Families provide emotional support and serve to nurture social and economic well-being. They define and shape the cultural ethos of a society and transmit societal values from one generation to the next. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that all members of the family — women, children, youth, the elderly and disabled persons — should be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse. We should promote a culture of respect for the rights of women, of the protection and development of children and of care for the elderly, the disabled and the infirm. Governments, private enterprises, non-governmental organizations and international agencies should formulate and implement "family-sensitive" policies so that the family may be enabled to act as a medium for promoting healthy values and socio-economic development.

Mrs. Hoenigsperger (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The structural adjustment programmes imposed in the developing countries often result in the retrenchment of essential social services. They place increasing burdens on the family, particularly on women, children and other vulnerable family members. Priority must be given to encouraging and strengthening the fledgling social support systems that ensure the basic conditions for the development of a family.

The income-generating capacities of families, which are so crucial, can be strengthened in a stable, progressive and vibrant economic environment. The majority of the developing countries, trapped in a vicious circle of heavy debts, dwindling economic assistance, inequitable trade regimes and inadequate investment, cannot hope to ensure better living standards for their families. The United Nations, its specialized agencies and the international community should implement national efforts to eradicate illiteracy, provide basic health care and implement population welfare programmes.

The International Year of the Family has not been able to focus adequately on the plight of families living in conditions of war, armed conflict and civil strife. In

Bosnia, Palestine, Kashmir, Rwanda, Azerbaijan and many other parts of the world, families have suffered collectively as a result of repression and atrocities. In 1994 alone, hundreds of thousands of people were killed; women were raped; children were mutilated and killed; and homes were destroyed. Particularly vicious has been the practice of State-sponsored violence against innocent families in order to humiliate and terrorize entire communities. Rape has been used as an instrument of war. The Year should have been an occasion to express the international community's strong moral condemnation of these atrocities, but the focus, regrettably, has remained only on stable or quasi-stable societies. The movement of refugees and displaced persons fleeing oppression or environmental degradation has resulted in the disruption of these family units everywhere in the world. In addition, immigrant workers worldwide are facing increasing discrimination and persecution.

We urge all Member States, while finalizing specific proposals for the implementation of the follow-up to the Year, to make provisions for the return and rehabilitation of families traumatized and victimized during armed conflicts and civil strife.

Families in different parts of the world face different impediments in realizing their full potential for development. Our experience in Pakistan has been that efforts in the legal, educational and cultural spheres can yield significant results. In this context, conscious of the role of women in family structures, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, has taken a personal interest in putting an end to domestic violence against women. Under her leadership, the Government is committed to ensuring equal rights for men and women. We are committed to repealing all discriminatory laws and to signing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

As a first step towards the empowerment of women, 25 seats have been reserved for women in the National Assembly of Pakistan, and a specific percentage of government jobs has been earmarked for women. The legal protection of women, along with their economic empowerment, can play a significant role in strengthening families. Recently, we launched a project to increase the representation of women in the criminal justice administration. Incentives have been given to non-governmental organizations to undertake projects at the grass-roots level on a public-private partnership basis. In national development planning, priority has been assigned

to health care, employment generation and population welfare.

I must also add that Pakistan, as one of the co-initiators of the World Summit for Children, attaches special importance to the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

The International Year of the Family is a significant starting-point for a long-term process. When the Year is over, we hope that the family, the essential component of all healthy societies, will not be forgotten by Governments and international agencies.

The President: I call next on the representative of Mongolia, Mr. L. Bayart, Director of the International Organizations Department of the Ministry of External Relations of Mongolia.

Mr. Bayart (Mongolia): We have gathered here to discuss the status of world-wide activities in observance of the International Year of the Family and to set guidelines for further global action in support of families. In our view, the high policy-making level of participants is ample evidence of increased public and international awareness of the family issue and of the recognition by the community of nations of its far-reaching importance.

As we come closer to the end of the International Year of the Family we have a good opportunity to sum up the work already accomplished, identify major challenges that lie ahead and forge the necessary global consensus towards articulating forward-looking strategies for the good of families. The observance of the Year should, indeed, lead to a long-term process of integrating a more pronounced family component into both national development strategies and international cooperation.

It is heartening to note that in response to the United Nations initiative more than 150 countries have set up national coordinating bodies and formulated relevant plans of action in preparation for and observance of the Year. National efforts are being complemented by specific measures at the regional and international levels. A crucially important contribution was the holding of four regional and interregional preparatory meetings for the Year, which developed specific action-oriented recommendations. Here, I wish to take note of the Beijing Declaration on the Family in Asia and the Pacific adopted by the United Nations Asia and the Pacific preparatory meeting for the Year, held in May 1993.

The United Nations is in the vanguard of this global movement, as a number of its entities have been actively engaged in an intensive and coordinated preparatory process. My delegation wishes to commend the work being done by the secretariat for the International Year of the Family and its Coordinator, Mr. Henryk Sakolski, to set in motion a concerted campaign and provide organizational and substantive support to numerous initiatives around the world.

An impressive array of non-governmental organizations have throughout been our important partners in the preparation for and observance of the Year. Here special mention should in our view be made of the World Forum of non-governmental organizations on launching the International Year of the Family, a major global convocation of non-governmental organizations held in Malta late last year.

Worldwide, the family has been undergoing constant transformation resulting from social and cultural changes, economic upheavals and the pressures of modernization and development. Traditional definitions of family structure based on two major types, nuclear and extended families, are being enriched with the emergence of new family types such as cohabitation, same-gender relationships and single-parent and reorganized families. Although such changes differ from country to country, the fundamental function of the family as a basic unit in society remains unchanged. And, as such, families provide the fullest reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of the social and developmental welfare environment, thereby offering a uniquely comprehensive human-centred approach to development, and to social issues in particular. In this sense, we believe that major upcoming world events such as the Social Summit and the international conferences on women and on human settlements should give due consideration to the family component in formulating their strategies and programmes of action.

We welcome the opportunity offered by the International Year of the Family to focus attention on the numerous family issues, and in particular on that of vulnerable families. Single-parent families, especially the growing number of households headed by females, are among the poorest. It is estimated that one third of all families are now single-parent families where a woman is the sole bread-winner. The poverty level of families with disabled members is also high. Labour migration to secure a livelihood is frequently a source of family tension and disintegration. Refugee and internationally

displaced families are another group of families at risk. Families affected by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) require particular attention. Family breakdown is reflected in increasing domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, sexual abuse, and child abuse and neglect. There is still much to be done to raise awareness of these problems with a view to addressing them adequately. With that in view, my delegation believes that the international community should now actively work to formulate a sound follow-up of the Year to sustain its momentum.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 44/82, which proclaimed 1994 the International Year of the Family, the focus of activities for observance of the Year is at the local and national levels. In Mongolia as in many other countries, a national committee for the International Year of the Family was set up earlier this year. The Committee is headed by the Minister of Population and Labour and is composed of representatives of key Government ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations and the mass media. At its first meeting the Committee adopted a national plan of action, which includes the following elements, among others: review of existing family legislation and enactment of new laws on the rights of children and the aged; formulation of a comprehensive national policy designed to strengthen and support families; launching of research campaigns under the themes "Family and population development", "Family and equality", "Family households under a market economy", "Family concepts and the traditional way of life of Mongols", and others; organization of a national conference on the protection of maternal and child health and the family; establishment of family-counselling centres in rural and urban areas; nationwide observance of 15 May as the International Day of the Family to promote awareness of the Year's objectives and of national priorities; and a series of mass-media publications and radio and television broadcasts on the global and national activities to observe the Year.

National preparatory activities helped to reveal more vividly the existence of acute family-related problems. Their predominant causes can be largely ascribed to the upheavals of transition. Dismantling of the old system of economic governance, coupled with the abrupt disruption of the external economic and trade environment, resulted in a sharp economic decline, and the emergence of such social evils as poverty and unemployment. Aside from the economic sphere, the transition process involves the social, cultural and spiritual life of Mongols, bringing with it other, no lesser challenges, including, *inter alia*, the

deterioration of the social safety net and the educational system. All these factors have caused a marked decline in the living standards of the population, which directly affects the well-being of families. Fully aware of the existing situation, the Government of Mongolia is taking bold measures, allocating more than 20 per cent of its budget to human-priority concerns and executing strategies to improve the status of children, women, the aged and other vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to express its full support for the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its commitment to promoting them further.

The President: I call next on the representative of New Zealand, Mr. John McKinnon.

Mr. McKinnon (New Zealand): The symbol chosen as the logo for the International Year of the Family, a heart sheltered by a roof, is an apt one. Nineteen ninety-four, the International Year of the Family, has been taken to heart in New Zealand. There has been celebration of the fundamental role played by the family in all its diverse forms. There has been work, looking at issues important to the place of the family in our community. These activities will help us carry forward the aims of the International Year. They will make a difference to family participation in our society.

New Zealand's participation in the Year has been substantial. Through Government funding, an International Year of the Family Committee was appointed early in October 1993. Prominent New Zealanders active in providing services to families were invited to form this Committee, which worked in liaison with the Department of Social Welfare.

The Government recognized the importance of the United Nations objectives for the Year in stimulating local, national and international action as part of a sustained long-term effort to increase awareness of family issues and highlight the importance of families. The New Zealand Committee had two primary objectives: first, to reinforce that the family is the principal medium for the socialization, education, care and protection of children; and, secondly, to provide an education programme on ways to promote and access services for families across all the programmes available both in the Government and in the voluntary sectors in New Zealand.

To fulfil these objectives the Committee identified three key activity areas. Generating awareness was the first, the second was facilitating community activity and the third was information-gathering.

There is certainly a high level of awareness of the Year in New Zealand. It was launched at dawn on 1 January 1994 in Gisborne, the first city in the world to greet the new year and the new day. The ceremony involved Ministers, media, personalities and the leaders from the Maori community. The national theme song for the Year, "Good for Life", by a prominent New Zealand band, has become familiar to most of our people. The theme statement, "The family is good for life", has aided the promotion of the Year, and a related theme is adopted for each month of 1994. Research in July suggested that 85 per cent of adults were aware of the International Year. Community activity for the Year has been sustained through several initiatives. Twenty "honourary ambassadors" were appointed for the Year. These were prominent New Zealanders involved in promoting the Year nationally and locally. Additionally, International Year of the Family coordinators were appointed by local governments.

In the area of information-gathering, the major research project commissioned by the Government of New Zealand for the International Year of the Family has been particularly important. The project is called "Accessing Family Services". It is founded on the Government's concern that families should have appropriate access to effective and coordinated sources of help and advice in times of family crisis. Research into how the agencies providing these services communicate with their clients has been undertaken, as has consumer research in local communities. As a result, information programmes relating to a broad range of services nationally are expected to be revised, augmented and monitored on a continuing basis. So, the project will contribute significantly to the empowerment of families within society and have long-term benefits.

Just as important as the Government's input has been the community response to the Year in New Zealand. It is this that has made the Year for us. Thirty community-initiated projects for the Year have been funded from an allocation by the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board. They have included family violence intervention projects, cultural specific services and parent support projects. An illustration is a pilot project on parenting skills based on *kaupapa Maori*, or Maori cultural principles.

And so, at the conclusion of the International Year of the Family, it is particularly heartening to be able to say that new services are becoming available to families, as well as increased information about existing services. Research on family issues initiated during the Year continues in academic institutions. Recent policy emphasis on promoting and supporting the role of families in society has been reinforced for the future. This includes innovative legislation passed in 1989 for involving extended families in decision-making in child welfare cases.

New Zealand looks forward to the visit of Mr. Henryk Sakolski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, in early December. We are delighted that Mr. Sakolski will be giving the keynote address at an international conference in Auckland on strengthening families. We expect the conference's results to feed directly into Government policy development processes, together with the outcomes of other International Year of the Family initiatives.

We have also been pleased to be able to contribute internationally to the Year, including through funding several International Year of the Family projects in the South and South-East Asia region. Studies relating to literacy in the Jaipur district in India and to the families of street children in the Philippines were two such projects. We were also pleased to fund a women's entrepreneurship development programme in India.

The Year is an opportunity to promote new awareness of the multiple crises that families anywhere can face and of what can be done to avert them. Families around the world vary in their form and structure. Many differing strengths come from this diversity. Building on the basis of such differences is particularly relevant as we move towards 1995, the United Nations Year for Tolerance.

We are hopeful that the tangible benefits of the many activities carried out world-wide during the course of the International Year of the Family will continue to be realized over time. We have seen the central role of women in development highlighted in the context of the United Nations Conference on Population and Development. We will continue to look for emphasis to be placed on the situation of women, children, youth, ageing persons, disabled persons and indigenous people in the context of preparations for the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen next year.

We firmly believe that there must be a strong focus on the role of the family if the many and complex social issues faced by societies today are to be addressed successfully. Let us hope that families in countries that are themselves in crisis will also gradually benefit from the understanding and support of those in more fortunate circumstances. The importance of the family to nations' survival cannot be underestimated. We salute the international humanitarian agencies engaged in working in these situations, where families are very often disempowered and fragmented.

We must now work to ensure that the efforts made during 1994 to recognize, support and celebrate the role of the family have a continuing influence on the international social agenda.

Finally, let me return to the image of the United Nations logo for the Year. The roof over the heart can symbolize the shelter given to the individual within his or her family. It may also stand for the recognition and support our societies can give to the families within them, with their diverse forms and faces.

The President: I call next on the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mr. Mohamed A. Azwai.

Mr. Azwai (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The celebration of the International Year of the Family in 1994 reflects the international community's awareness, as represented by this General Assembly of the United Nations, that the family is the embodiment at the popular level of all the strengths and weaknesses in the fields of social and developmental welfare in society and that it provides society with a uniquely comprehensive means of tackling all social issues. There is also the awareness that the family is the fundamental social unit and the principal and effective factor in the process of development at every level.

This celebration also reflects the awareness of the international community that the family, as the fundamental social unit, faces the threat of deterioration and disintegration today as a result of a number of social, economic and political factors and due to the many conflicts and wars now raging in many parts of the world. Such factors have led to the destruction and disintegration of thousands of families. In addition, there has been the impact of economic pressures arising from the dire poverty in which millions of families live in all parts of the world. This makes it incumbent upon us not to be content with

celebrating but rather to focus on setting up practical programmes for protecting and developing the family and eliminating those threats to its stability and survival.

We in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya believe that an individual without family has no meaning and no social life and that if human society sinks to the point where men exist and develop outside the family, it will turn into a gathering of lost, uprooted hoboos. The unspeakable things we witness nowadays, such as vagrancy, juvenile delinquency, the trade in children, their prostitution, pornography, the spread of drugs and AIDS, are all causes and effects of the disintegration of the family. Now the international community has the opportunity afforded by a number of forthcoming international conferences to remedy those grave social ills, particularly during the World Summit on Social Development in Denmark and the World Conference on Women in Beijing next year.

Libya's concern with the family and its protection is not a thing of the recent past. It has very deep roots in the traditions of my country, as well as in the Arab-Islamic culture to which we belong. Libyan legislation therefore contains many laws on the protection of the family. The law decrees that every individual has the right to form a family. All minors whose families have been lost or have disintegrated for any reason, as well as the handicapped, the infirm and the aged, have the right to full social welfare. The Libyan penal code further includes laws for penalties against crimes perpetrated against the family, such as the failure to meet family obligations, the abuse of corporal punishment and the abuse of children or of any members of the family, as well as penalties against the perpetrators of crimes against the moral values of families and crimes that threaten the existence of the family.

The green Charter on Human Rights adopted by the Peoples' Congress in June 1988 includes a number of articles concerning the importance of the family and the need to protect it, in the interests of the individual and of society. In paragraph 20, it provides that it is one of man's sacred rights to grow up in a family of father, mother and siblings. Article 25 of the Law on the Promotion of Liberty provides for the right of every individual citizen to form a family.

It is truly ironic that while celebrating the year declared by the Assembly as the International Year of the Family, the Libyan family and Libyan society should suffer from international sanctions imposed by one of the

organs of this very Organization, namely the Security Council. Those sanctions have led to grave human suffering to Libyan families owing to the lack of medicines and of possibilities of treatment, which led to the delay in vaccinating thousands of children and the death of a number of those awaiting permission to go abroad for treatment. Entire families have been lost because of road accidents, roads having become the main means of transport in the country. All this befell the Libyan family while Libya has been celebrating the International Year of the Family! We appeal to this august Assembly immediately to lift these unjust, unjustifiable sanctions.

The suffering of the Libyan family came as a result of the political hegemony of certain States on this international Organization. They have not stopped there. Indeed, they are attempting through this Organization and other international forums and meetings to impose their culture and values on other nations and cultures, including the imposition of rather strange forms of the family unit which are unacceptable to societies and cultures that are much older and which cannot accept that any State or culture has the right to try and impose itself and its culture on other peoples.

Finally, my country hopes that the International Year of the Family and the present discussion will be the start of an effort to promote and protect the family from dislocation and disintegration, so that we may create a happy, humane society in which peoples would cooperate in fraternity, peace and equality.

The President: The next speaker is the Minister for Social and Women's Affairs of Cameroon, Mrs. Yaou Aissatou, upon whom I now call.

Mrs. Aissatou (Cameroon) (interpretation from French): Speaking on behalf of the Republic of Cameroon at this important International Conference on Families, I am pleased and proud to note that the Conference affords us an opportunity to restore the human person to a central, rightful place in the development process.

That said, I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General, for having decided to organize this special gathering devoted to families and for having incorporated it into the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

I should also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Henryk Sakolski, Coordinator of the permanent secretariat of the International Year of the Family, and all

his team for the effective manner in which they are supervising the events marking the celebration of the Year.

I should also like to join previous speakers in extending very sincere congratulations to the President and other officers of the Conference on their well-deserved election and to assure them of our full cooperation in successfully completing our work.

In Cameroon the family, whatever form it may take as a result of the socio-cultural outlook of local communities, is viewed as the basic unit of society. Whether monogamous or polygamous, nuclear, extended or single-parent, the family in Cameroon has as its fundamental purpose providing the first milieu for the socialization of the child. Under the Constitution, the State has the duty to protect and promote the family so that it can play a useful part in implementing national population policy, whose ultimate goal is the promotion of a quality population by safeguarding the health of mother and child.

A study on the Cameroon family carried out in 1988, with the financial support of the World Bank, enabled us to identify the major challenges facing the family in my country. Foremost among them is poverty, the greatest obstacle to the family's assuming with dignity its basic socio-educational, health and economic functions and practising family planning. The family's role has been enhanced recently by the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, which have been extended to social strata that in 1986 could be said to have risen above the poverty line.

A second challenge is the breakdown of value systems, a result of the cultural shock created by the conflict between tradition and modernity. This is a fundamental problem, gradually becoming more acute with the development of a global culture created by the growth of mass media and modern systems of communication and telecommunication.

Those challenges, along with many others, affect the structure and functioning of the family in Cameroon, with the following consequences: first, a progressive weakening of the institution of marriage as the basic element of the fundamental family unit; secondly, a marked weakening of the bonds of family unity and of the social control hitherto exercised over its members, particularly the children, by adults — in this case, parents.

The study, along with others on poverty, has enabled the Cameroon Government to improve its strategy for educating the people on responsible parenting. That strategy, drawn up in the framework of the national population policy and implemented through social centres, is designed to improve family function by educating individuals, couples and communities on family living, sexual life, family planning and community living for development. It has also enabled us to target various policies to reduce poverty, to make the family the true foundation of social stability and national integration and to reach a better understanding of the place of women in various development programmes.

The family code now being drawn up will, when adopted, provide a more solid legal basis for this strategy so that the family in our society will become the special place in which ideals of human development can be formed and take root.

Cameroon is pleased that since the New York Summit for Children in 1990 the health of mothers and children has become — more than in the past — a concern of the international community, even if my country regrets the lack of additional resources from agencies on the system in support of programmes in this area.

The United Nations initiative to declare 1994 the International Year of the Family and to organize this Conference on Families only a few months before the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development has a twofold significance for us.

On one hand, this initiative strengthens our conviction that all forms of sustainable human development that seek to promote the comprehensive well-being of man and his offspring must necessarily reflect the family as the basic unit of society. On the other hand, it strengthens in us the idea that the advancement of family well-being requires the promotion of the various components of the family unit — the father, the mother and the child.

The results of widespread social mobilization around the theme of the family during 1994 and the recommendations of the present Conference on Families are preparing the platform that we should like to see given to the family at the World Summit for Social Development.

The approach of sustainable human development is today challenging the entire international community. A vision of development focusing solely on economics has led to many failures and frustrations and, thereby,

demonstrated its limitations. From this forum we should welcome the United Nations initiative, undertaken since 1990, to issue the human development index for each country. That index, because it is the product of economic and social indicators, is a better reflection of a country's state of development.

Despite socio-economic difficulties in our countries, families continue to be the last refuge for many of their members — a place where those people can still hope to rediscover the meaning of humanity and a real spirit of solidarity. Those two values are particularly lacking in interpersonal relations today. We believe that a form of development focused on the advancement of the family will make it possible to restore them and, through the dynamic of the family, will help to reintroduce them into the community as a whole as a means of reorienting national and international development by putting it on a foundation that is more respectful of mankind and of the whole person.

The consensus that is taking shape at the international level on the need to replace economic development with human development; the keen interest that the international community is showing in issues pertaining to children, women, the family, protection of the environment, human rights and issues of governance; and the conviction of the need for solidarity, the clearest proof of which is the end of East-West antagonism — these are all gains in the international context that give us hope that we can believe in development with a human face through transfers of resources released as part of the peace dividend to programmes aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening the family.

We must make it possible for the family to realize its full human potential so that that hope may become a reality.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Abdu Hadid, on whom I now call.

Mr. Abdu Hadid (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is a great pleasure for my delegation to see such a host of distinguished representatives celebrating the International Year of the Family. This attests to the extreme importance of the family as the principal building block of society and of the international community at large.

I should like, on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic, to give a brief overview of the activities and plans of action adopted by my country in celebration of the International Year with a view to bolstering the ethical, cultural, humanitarian and social values which underlie the family institution. I should like also to quote the wise words of President Hafiz al-Assad:

"When interaction and integration are fully achieved between man's endeavours within the family and man's productivity at work, then we are on the threshold of a new stage of social development."

The National Committee set up by my country to plan and coordinate activities for the International Year of the Family, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund, has organized a number of national seminars, and it has adopted several recommendations related to the health, educational, social, legislative and information fields, in keeping with authentic Arab principles and values, which dignify and protect the family as the basic cell of human society.

Protection of the family is the joint responsibility of the family itself, the State and society. Parents have very specific responsibilities — protection of the family and caring for its members; avoidance of the causes of family disintegration; and abstention from the practice of any kind of gender discrimination against any family member, one purpose of which is to ensure that sons and daughters are given equal educational opportunities to enable them to develop appropriately.

On the other hand, the State and society at large have to endeavour, by various means, to protect the family against weakness and disintegration.

First, by creating the appropriate social, economic, legislative and psychological conditions that would enable the family to continue to play its proper role;

Secondly, by adopting appropriate policies to ensure the cohesion and stability of the family in order for it to interact positively with the objectives of development, while avoiding excessive consumerism;

Thirdly, by offering more assistance, support and protection to the family, especially in the remote areas, through the provision of high-quality development-oriented social services. The phenomenon of delinquency could be avoided through the adoption of the well-known mechanisms of social defence.

Proceeding from these principles and beliefs, allow me to convey to you the most important recommendations adopted and implemented:

At the level of health care, increasing the number of primary health programmes so as to make them accessible to each and every member of the family, in the context of the overall objective of "health for all by the year 2000"; further expansion of preventive health services and medical treatment, as well as protection of children and mothers; increasing support for grassroots and private organizations so that they may play their roles in promoting family awareness, especially in the area of family planning; and lastly, increasing the awareness of the family as to the dangers of drugs, AIDS and other diseases, and as to how one can protect the family and its members from such ills.

At the educational level, we have decided to adopt an integrated educational approach, that ensures full interaction between the family itself, school and society, in order to prepare the present generations for the future. We have decided also to expand our illiteracy campaigns beyond mere literacy or numeracy, and have focused primarily on parents, in order to eradicate all forms of illiteracy at the educational, social, economic and cultural levels. We have decided to carry out field studies to highlight the important role played by parents in the education of their children, especially their daughters; and have decided to prepare guides for parents explaining how to deal with their children and orienting them educationally, socially and in terms of health. At least one practical lesson per week will focus on the upbringing of children under the supervision of health-care specialists and social workers.

At the social level, we decided to increase the protection offered by the State to the family so as to satisfy the family's basic needs and provide it with social guarantees so that it may be able to bring up its children properly and, thereby, to contribute to the building and development of society. Efforts will be redoubled towards the formulation of plans that would help families achieve social stability and raise their standards of living through expanded social services, especially in low-income and rural areas. Social services provided to various families will be expanded through the creation of new social institutions, consultation and guidance centres. The number of nurseries and kindergartens operated by Government and popular institutions is being increased. The needs of mothers at home are being provided in order for them to participate more fully in the process of

development. Appropriate technology in rural areas is introduced at a much larger scale in order to increase agricultural production for local consumption and to improve living standards in the rural areas, thereby improving conditions on the whole.

At the legislative level, we encouraged more support for the role of the family in solving its own problems, updating national legislation whenever necessary in keeping with social and economic development policies and with an eye to achieving sustainable development. We also updated family legislation in Syria in keeping with changed national circumstances, both at the social and economic levels.

In the area of information, we have focused on the importance of mass media in educating the family and increasing its awareness. To this end, we have adopted very clear information policies to protect the family and its members from delinquency.

Allow me to convey the recommendation made by the Syrian National Committee for the International Year of the Family, supporting the proposal adopted by the Arab Conference on Human Rights, held in Cairo at the beginning of this year, namely, to change the date of the celebration of the International Day of the Family to a date other than 15 May, because 15 May coincides with a very painful date in the history of our Arab nation.

Finally, I would call upon all of you to support the principal nucleus of our society, the family, because protecting the family means protecting and ensuring the safety of human society as a whole.

The President: I call now on the Permanent Representative of Brazil, Mr. Ronaldo Sardenberg.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil): At the outset, I wish to indicate that the delegation of Brazil fully subscribes to the statement made today by the Permanent Representative of Paraguay on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. I would like to take this opportunity to add a few remarks to specify the Brazilian perspective on the International Year of the Family.

These are times of extraordinary change: the globalization of the world economy, the quick access to information, the growing rhythm of urbanization, as well as the increasing awareness that events in different areas of the globe can affect the standards of living of societies thousands of kilometres apart, all these phenomena affect the family.

Through the ages the family has played a role in the process of socialization and education, the paramount importance of which need not be further emphasized. Today the family is coming to grips with the challenge of having to adapt quickly to an ever-changing environment. It is not immune to the new economic, social and cultural realities.

The viability of our societies in the future and the well-being of our descendants will depend on our ability to cope with this process of adaptation directly, so as to avoid a possible trend towards the disintegration of the family structure.

The role of family life in society is manifold. It is at the family level that solutions can be found to many of the social ills of our times. Because it is the core structure in society, it retains potential as a fundamental tool in the formulation and implementation of policies in areas such as education, health, and sanitation.

Given these challenges and possibilities, we consider it entirely appropriate that the international community and the United Nations should devote significant efforts to addressing issues of concern to the family. Brazil joined the consensus that resulted in resolution 44/82, launching the International Year of the Family, aimed at promoting increased awareness of family issues and at improving the institutional capability of countries to tackle family-related problems with comprehensive policies.

The President returned to the Chair.

From the standpoint of public policies, it is important to stress that a fragmented approach to family issues — children, youth, the elderly and disabled persons, for instance — does not necessarily provide the response required by the family unit in permanent interaction. Public policies aimed at specific segments of the population cannot fail to consider the concrete living conditions and survival strategies of family groupings, which vary according to their position within the social structure.

The Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 dedicates an entire chapter to the family. It establishes the basic framework for family-related policies. Our Constitution considers the family as the basis of society, and provides for special protection and support by the State. The family, together with the State, bears primary

responsibility for respect for the rights of the child and the adolescent.

Six years have elapsed since the promulgation of the Brazilian Constitution, which can claim the status of a legal landmark on its handling of family issues. The passing of other important pieces of legislation in Brazil also deserve to be mentioned. They include the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, the Organic Law for Social Assistance and the National Policy on Ageing. There remains, however, a significant gap between the law and the reality faced by families in Brazil. Government and society alike are doing their utmost to bridge this gap in order to allow all families to enjoy the benefits of social and economic development.

In order to carry out the activities pursuant to the International Year of the Family, an Interministerial Committee was established by President Itamar Franco for the formulation of Brazilian policy on the family. In September a debate was conducted in Brasilia on the National Plan for the Brazilian Family.

The Brazilian National Plan sets the principles and strategies for our national policy in this domain, defining areas of responsibility of the various Ministries. The national policy will be coordinated, at the federal level, by a permanent commission composed of 10 Government representatives and 10 representatives of interested non-governmental organizations. The Commission also includes representatives of the States of the federation and of municipalities.

The main guidelines of this Plan include participation of the family in the formulation, implementation, follow-up and assessment of Government policies and programmes; respect for social and cultural diversity; and the need for appropriate funding at all Government levels to finance activities related to the family.

In 1992 Brazil hosted one of the international meetings aimed at discussing special chapters of the Declaration on the Rights of Families, which is scheduled to be launched in December this year, in the context of the initiatives promoted by the International Union of Family Organizations. The meeting in Brazil was an important preparatory event where topics regarding the economic rights of the family were discussed.

On behalf of the Brazilian delegation, I would like also to stress the importance of the Declaration of Cartagena, issued by the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting in preparation for the International Year

of the Family. Among many relevant points, the Declaration states the willingness of the countries of the region to

"transform the family into a prime agent of programmes aimed at specific population groups, incorporating the dimensions of gender, age, status, ethnic origin and level of vulnerability." (LC/G.1777(CONF.84/5, p. 31))

The International Conference on Population and Development, in which Brazil participated constructively, dedicated one chapter of its Programme of Action to the diversity of family structures and composition and the required socio-economic support. The Programme of Action recognizes that the process of worldwide rapid demographic and socio-economic changes has influenced patterns of family formation and family life, thus generating considerable change in family composition and structure. It also admits that widespread migration caused by conflicts, urbanization, poverty and natural disasters has placed great strains on the family. Governments should take these realities into consideration when formulating socio-economic development policies, programmes and legislation aiming at contributing to the stability of families. Families are increasingly vulnerable. Single-parent families headed by women, poor families with elderly members, refugee and displaced families, among others, deserve special attention.

The Cairo Programme of Action recommends that Governments should provide the necessary support and protection for these most vulnerable families. They should also formulate family-sensitive policies in the areas of health, education, employment, housing and social security.

My Government is committed to implement programmes and actions recommended by the Cairo Conference, and is considering an entire set of measures focused on the family. We are motivated by the realization that this basic institution must receive comprehensive support.

In concluding, I would like to emphasize that the enormous tasks ahead of us concerning family issues must gain proper international attention throughout the United Nations system as well as other institutions, especially those dedicated to the promotion of social and economic development.

The President (*interpretation from French*): In accordance with the decision taken yesterday afternoon, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See, His Eminence Alfonso Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family.

Cardinal Lopez Trujillo (Holy See) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity that is offered to the Holy See.

This meeting is taking place in the International Year of the Family, proclaimed by the United Nations and celebrated by the Catholic Church in the various nations of the world with particular enthusiasm.

In Rome, on 8 and 9 October, significant events took place in connection with the World Meeting of Families with Pope John Paul II, when an immense multitude — like a sea into which abundant tributaries flowed — of nearly 200,000 pilgrims from almost every country in the world filled St. Peter's Square.

This celebration was preceded by numerous activities carried out in all countries, showing the vitality of the family. The Rome meeting with the Pope was thus a demonstration of hope placed in the energies of the family, based on marriage as a community of life and love, characterized by the reciprocal self-giving of a man and a woman, a husband and wife, in a free and stable — until death — responsible way that is open to life. Children are indeed God's most precious gift to marriage.

In the Catholic Church the Charter of the Rights of the Family, prepared by the Holy See, is the instrument that has been used as the basis for work and dialogue. It incorporates the principal aspects of and points on the matter, based on a rich conception of fundamental human rights, because the rights of the family are a systematic manifestation and application of the natural law in reference to the family community, the vital foundation of society.

During this Year it has been possible to study in depth what the family entails as the vital basis of society and to draw the consequences for both the personal and social spheres and for the life of humanity in the network of the human family. It would not be logical or coherent to state and recognize that the family is the basic unit of the social fabric and then to deny or weaken its status as a true social subject, with its own particular sovereignty, rights and duties.

Pope John Paul II refers to these vital themes in his rich *Letter to Families*, his gift to the human family on the occasion of this International Year.

At a recent meeting in Rome with many families from all around the world we were able to verify the deep convergence between the most varied religions regarding the fundamental values of the family. It could not be otherwise, for the family is the heritage of mankind through which the future of society on our planet necessarily passes.

It is very important to bring together similar manifestations in the cultural heritage of our peoples. In the *Nichomachaen Ethics* we can read the following reflections:

"Friendship between husband and wife is recognized; it is natural; in fact, by nature, man is more inclined to live as a couple than to associate politically, because the family is something prior to, and more necessary than, the State".
(*Nichomachaen Ethics*, VIII, 15-20)

This text, as is well known, was written 350 years before Christ by Aristotle.

Throughout history attempts have been made to defend and to help the family community, in which the good of the spouses, the children and society is ensured. I do not wish to dwell on this aspect for too long, but what would be the future of children, their harmonious development, their upbringing in the sense of an integral education, and their dynamic and positive inclusion in society, if they were not born and raised in a family, as a responsible union of hearts under one roof, as we see it in the United Nations symbol for the International Year of the Family? Are not the strength of the family and its protection the best guarantee for respecting children, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Children are the first victims of instability and erosion. They are innocent victims, who have the right to their parents' generous and self-sacrificing love, their example, and an education of which their parents' behaviour is a necessary condition.

Today all kinds of very high social costs are being paid, either because millions of children do not have families or, as the Pope says, because they are like orphans with living parents.

In this International Year we are called upon to confirm and implement, as is appropriate and necessary, one fundamental principle: the family based on marriage is a value proper to this natural institution, willed by God, and inscribed in the depths of human nature. It is a value, I repeat, as the Second Vatican Council notes, for spouses, children and society.

The family is not a private matter and situation; it has social importance that is not derived from any concessions or generosity of the State. We have had occasion to observe, on the one hand, what some nations have achieved, and on the other, a systematic emptying of family policies and legislation worthy only of the name in many countries. A number of documents of the International Year refer to the requirement to deal with this.

An adequate family policy requires that the family be recognized and helped as a social subject, one that integrates each and every one of its members — the man and woman, husband and wife, sons and daughters, babies, youth, the elderly, the healthy and the sick.

We have been able to work more vigorously for the members of the family who also deserve appropriate assistance of a social nature that is in harmony with, and not in opposition to the family as an integrating body or community.

Together with the repeated desire for real recognition of the rights of the family and necessary positive family legislation, to which Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Church are very committed, I should like to express the hope for a decisive, enthusiastic and universal defence of the family by those who govern. If they act in this manner they will be encouraging harmony with the good of the family, society and the common good, which must be ensured for all mankind.

During the preparatory process for the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, His Holiness the Pope expressed concern regarding the treatment of the traditional form of the family. The Holy See is pleased to note that in the principles of the Cairo document, the basis for interpreting and understanding the whole text it is clearly stated in principle 9 that

“the family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support.”

The same principle goes on to say:

“Marriage must be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses, and husband and wife should be equal partners.”

That principle must inspire all family policy and any true demographic policy.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Henryk Sakolski, the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, who was with us at the World Meeting of Families with the Pope, for the diploma he gave me designating the Pontifical Council for the Family as a co-sponsor of this International Year.

Finally, I transmit the paternal and hopeful greetings to all assembled here — and their families — from Pope John Paul II, the Pope of the family, the Pope of life.

The President (*interpretation from French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this International Conference on Families devoted to the implementation of the follow-up of the International Year of the Family.

I should like to thank all the high-ranking individuals and the non-governmental organizations that have come to the United Nations Headquarters in New York to express their view of the importance of the family in the world today. We hope that this enterprise will be continued.

Agenda item 152

Observer status for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the General Assembly: draft resolution (A/49/L.3)

The President (*interpretation from French*): I call on the representative of Australia to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/49/L.3.

Mr. Rowe (Australia): It is my honour to introduce, on behalf of the sponsors, the draft resolution contained in document A/49/L.3 of 17 October 1994, by which the General Assembly would invite the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of Observer.

The 100 Member States which sponsored this draft resolution are listed in document A/49/L.3. To these should be added Albania, Azerbaijan, Chad, China, Comoros, Dominica, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Nicaragua, Niger, Paraguay, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Tajikistan, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam, making a total of 129 sponsors.

The basis on which the International Federation is seeking Observer status in the General Assembly is contained in the explanatory memorandum in document A/49/192. The sponsors wish to draw the attention of the members of the General Assembly to the following points in particular.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (formerly the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), founded in 1919, is the federation of 162 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies throughout the world. It acts under its own Constitution with all the rights and obligations of a corporate body with a legal personality. Its secretariat is based in Geneva.

A recent survey established that the member societies of the Federation together represent some 127 million volunteer members, with approximately 270,000 employed staff.

In accordance with its Constitution, the Federation is the official representative of its member societies in the international field, the guardian of their integrity and the protector of their interests.

The functions of the Federation, endorsed by States when they adopt the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, are, *inter alia*: to bring relief by all available means to all disaster victims; to organize, coordinate and direct international relief actions and to assist the national societies in their disaster relief preparedness; to bring help to victims of armed conflicts in accordance with the agreements concluded by the International Committee of the Red Cross; to encourage and promote in every country the establishment and development of an independent and duly recognized national society; and to carry out the mandates entrusted to it by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which brings together Governments and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement.

With an average of well over 400 delegates working in 12 regional and 53 country delegations, the Federation secretariat, with the support of its member societies that provide the major part of the funds, relief consignments and personnel, has been active in 1994 throughout the world, providing assistance to victims of disasters and sustaining development programmes.

In 1994, programmes coordinated through the International Federation are assisting 19.2 million beneficiaries in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas.

In addition to these emergencies-related programmes, millions of others are assisted through national activities ranging from disaster preparedness, maternal and child health, first aid, women and development, youth and social programmes aimed, in particular, at improving the situation of those who are most vulnerable.

The agenda and tasks of the Federation and the United Nations increasingly complement one another and interact with increasing frequency.

A particularly close cooperation has over the years evolved with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The creation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has given particular focus to the humanitarian agenda within the central United Nations organs. The role and functions of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs are today of direct relevance to the mandates of the Economic and Social Council, as well as to those of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Federation, having been invited, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross, to participate in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, could make an enhanced contribution, through the provision of advice and expertise, to these United Nations organs as they strive for effective coordination of humanitarian relief, if it were to be granted observer status.

Moreover, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement practises a close cooperation between its components both in the field and at the secretariat level. It would be beneficial to the General Assembly to increase the effectiveness of the Movement as a whole by admitting the Federation as an Observer, thereby

complementing the contribution of the International Committee of the Red Cross in terms of its different mandate, as well as of its know-how and operational capacity.

The Federation has a specificity similar to that of the United Nations in building its membership on the principle of one country — one member. Both promote universality as a leading principle. The Federation is an international organization composed of member societies, the unique character and mandate of which has been defined, at the national as well as the international level, by nearly all the States that are also the very Members of the United Nations. This represents, both in substance and in structure, a unique position in the international community.

As a humanitarian organization which is involved globally, on a huge scale, in disaster-relief operations as well as day-to-day health and social programmes, the Federation considers that it would be important and mutually beneficial to have the opportunity to participate as an Observer in the work of the General Assembly when policy on humanitarian issues is being developed and discussed. In addition, Federation observer status in the General Assembly would be of mutual benefit to the two organizations and above all to disaster victims, as it would further strengthen the communications and operational cooperation between the United Nations and the Federation.

The special and unique features outlined above and in the explanatory memorandum and the shared common humanitarian task of the United Nations and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies provide strong justification for according the Federation observer status.

Accordingly, on behalf of the 129 sponsors, representing in numbers over two thirds of the membership of the United Nations, and in geographical terms all the regions of the world, I request that the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution, which would grant observer status for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the General Assembly.

The President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on the representative of Gambia, who will speak on behalf of the African States.

Mr. Jallow (Gambia): On behalf of the African Group of States and of my own delegation of the Gambia, I have the pleasure to express our support for draft

resolution A/49/L.3 on observer status for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the General Assembly.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has over the years proved its universal vigilance in quickly reacting to emergency situations all over the world. The nature and extent of the Federation's activities, which cover every facet of our lives, either directly or indirectly, have continued to receive international acclaim.

The universality of the work of the Federation is complemented by the international nature of its membership, drawn from 162 countries. The organization has therefore been working closely with relevant United Nations agencies in the field of humanitarian activities. The Federation has played a heroic humanitarian role in conflict areas and disaster situations, which have continued to grow in number and frequency in recent years. Sometimes the severity and complexity of the conflict or disaster situation make these tasks not only daunting, but dangerous. This notwithstanding, the Federation has continued, guided by its overriding principles of neutrality and impartiality, its uninterrupted service to humankind, bringing its healing powers to the millions of victims — maimed and often homeless — of wars and natural disasters.

It is in recognition of these attributes and achievements of the Federation, its adherence to the basic tenets of the Charter of the United Nations and its willingness to serve whenever and wherever necessary throughout the world, that we recommend the adoption by consensus of the draft resolution before us, in order to make it possible for us to welcome the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to participation in the sessions and work of the General Assembly.

Mr. Mongbe (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): Benin, on whose behalf I have the honour to speak, is honoured that its name appeared on the impressive list of countries which joined in signing the letter requesting the inclusion of agenda item 152 on the agenda of this session and that it is a sponsor of draft resolution A/49/L.3, which would grant the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies observer status in the General Assembly.

It is no secret that the Federation is the largest and best-known humanitarian organization in the world, with

its 162 member national societies, which their respective Governments find very useful and highly appreciate. Since the end of the First World War, the emblem of the Federation has been respected throughout the world for its universality, neutrality, self-sacrifice and ability to prevent and mitigate the sufferings of the weakest, the most vulnerable and victims of every kind of atrocity.

My delegation endorses all the observations which my friend, the Ambassador of Australia, has just made in his eloquent introduction of the draft resolution before us, and those made by Ambassador Jallow of Gambia, who has just spoken on behalf of the African Group.

I would simply point out that, in addition to programmes involving coordinated emergency assistance by the International Federation to 19.2 million beneficiaries in Africa, Europe, Asia and America, national activities covering many areas — disaster preparation, mother- and child-care, blood transfusions, first aid, youth programmes and social programmes for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, the sick and the infirm — all provide help to millions of others.

At a time when the United Nations is becoming more dynamic in its humanitarian assistance through the creation and consolidation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, it would be advantageous to strengthen cooperation between the International Federation and the General Assembly and to broaden and enhance the Federation's existing relations with several specialized agencies of the World Organization.

My delegation believes that the unique characteristics of the International Federation, which the representative of Australia described a few moments ago, along with the humanitarian tasks it shares with the United Nations, are sufficient to grant it observer status in the General Assembly.

My delegation praises the determination of all those delegations which supported the Federation's candidacy and commends the spirit of cooperation of all the other delegations which, hesitant at the outset of the process, agreed to negotiate with a view to finding a *modus vivendi* with the former.

Admitting the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to the General Assembly with observer status will be a step forward towards dealing in a more coordinated and thus effective manner with the many

humanitarian problems that so often defy the capacity and credibility of our Organization.

Mr. Thanarajasingam (Malaysia): My delegation has consistently supported the application of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for observer status in the General Assembly. The agenda item we are considering today is the culmination of the efforts of the international community to accord this status to the Federation.

We wish to underline that the Federation fully deserves the status it is seeking. As the only international organization with representation by a large majority of Governments and one that is governed by statutes drawn up by Governments and organizations, it fully deserves the status that is being sought on its behalf by more than 120 countries from all regions.

With this status, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies would be well placed to enhance its collaboration with the United Nations, the United Nations specialized agencies and the United Nations sanctions Committee. Granting observer status to the Federation would also facilitate and strengthen its ability to network with target groups in providing urgently needed humanitarian assistance.

Mr. President, my delegation wishes to record its appreciation of your personal involvement in resolving this issue. The Permanent Representative of Australia deserves our appreciation as well. We recall the problems encountered earlier, and we are happy that a consensus acceptable to all was eventually achieved.

In conclusion, we would like to join Australia and the other 127 sponsors in commending the draft resolution formally endorsing observer status for the Federation.

Mr. Kovanda (Czech Republic): Let me be brief and to the point.

My delegation chairs the Eastern European Group of States this month, which is a great honour for us, but I am speaking here on behalf of my delegation only.

The Czech Republic is privileged to have co-sponsored draft resolution A/49/L.3, inviting the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to become a permanent observer in the General Assembly. We find the Federation unique; it has

members in 162 countries, and another 23 national societies are expected to be recognized in coming years. Once that happens, the Federation will have more members than our own United Nations, unless we take great care to "adopt" somebody else.

How much more universal can an organization actually be? Statistics about its programme have been listed and mentioned by previous speakers, especially by the representative of Australia, and I will not repeat them. We do, however, note that just over half of the total number of people who benefit from the assistance of the Federation are Europeans. Whether this is an appropriate proportion is another matter, but being European ourselves, we acknowledge this fact with gratitude.

This is a humanitarian organization which is non-sectarian and universal, far closer in its spirit to the principles of a civic society — which are very dear to my country's philosophy — than to the all too frequent recent manifestations of ethnic hatred, religious intolerance and sectarian strife. We appreciate that observer status should not be available even to worthy organizations as easily as buns in a bakery, to quote a Czech metaphor, but we feel that in this case we are talking about an organization that is not only unique, but truly deserving.

We feel that the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is so important that it is an honour for this General Assembly to benefit from the association that is about to take place. And if the Federation derives some use from its observer status with us, all the better.

Mr. Borda (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I, too, shall be very brief.

My delegation is pleased to be among those that have supported and sponsored draft resolution A/49/L.3, which invites the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to be a permanent observer in the General Assembly. The honour fell to my country, as representative of the Group of 77 and of the People's Republic of China, to call last year for the inclusion of this item on the agenda. We therefore support the views expressed by the representative of Australia in introducing the item today.

The Red Cross and the Red Crescent have, through their dogged and selfless cooperation at the international level, become well-established symbols of humanitarian assistance in aiding the victims of disasters, in addition to

victims of conflict, and assisting the neediest and most vulnerable. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, established 75 years ago, is inspired by the same principles of struggle against human suffering. Its present expansion responds to changes in today's world.

The considerable increase in the number of victims needing aid as a result of natural disasters and grave social crises provides additional reason for the existence of the Federation, which coordinates the humanitarian activities of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent at the global level. Moreover, the United Nations humanitarian programme includes many matters with which the International Federation is also concerned. These points of convergence fully justify observer status for the Federation.

It is therefore with special satisfaction that my delegation will welcome the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as a permanent Observer in the General Assembly.

The President (*interpretation from French*): We shall now take a decision on draft resolution A/49/L.3.

I should like to announce that the following countries have become sponsors of the draft resolution: the United Arab Emirates and Grenada.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/49/L.3?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 49/2).

The President (*interpretation from French*): Before calling on representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Rosenstock (United States of America): Had there been a vote on the question of granting observer status in the General Assembly to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, my delegation would have abstained. There is a procedure for establishing relationships between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. The procedure is rooted in Article 71 of the Charter, which reads in the relevant part:

"The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations."

Under that Article, and in compliance with it, a detailed procedure has been established, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV). The status of observers in the General Assembly should, in accordance with past practice and consistent with the sense of Article 71 of the Charter, be reserved for States and intergovernmental organizations.

If we continue to depart from that long-standing practice because of intense lobbying by national societies, or in order to respond to a particular organization's desire for what it perceives as equal prestige, we will be departing from the scheme of the Charter. We are also putting in peril the particular rights and privileges currently accorded to observers in the General Assembly. It would certainly be regrettable if the rights and privileges accorded to observers representing States and intergovernmental organizations had to be cut back to avoid jeopardizing the work of the Assembly.

We are pleased that there has been some recognition of these problems. The Assembly has decided to examine the question of criteria for the granting of General Assembly observer status and has established a moratorium on further granting of observer status until criteria are established. We are confident that the Sixth Committee, which has already begun its consideration of this matter, will endorse criteria consistent with the Charter scheme that will allow us to resume a rational handling of these matters.

The issue is not whether a given organization does enormous good work in the field of disaster relief, as the Federation surely does, or in the field of human rights or in combating hunger. The issue is how the United Nations can best recognize the special role of States and intergovernmental organizations and also continue to provide suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations.

Mrs. Horiuchi (Japan): While we joined in the adoption without a vote of draft resolution A/49/L.3, entitled "Observer status for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the General Assembly", we would have abstained had it been put to the vote. Our delegation is of the same view as that just offered by the representative of the United States, namely,

that, although we highly appreciate the activities of the Federation in the humanitarian field, observer status in the General Assembly should basically be limited to non-Member States and intergovernmental organizations.

In this context, it should be remembered that the observer status of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was conferred on an exceptional basis because of the ICRC's clear mandate and specific responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions. In this respect, we welcome the initiative taken by the Permanent Mission of the United States to establish a working group in the Sixth Committee to consider the question of criteria for granting observer status in the General Assembly. We hope that such criteria will be devised before we consider granting observer status to any other non-governmental organization.

The President (interpretation from French): In accordance with resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. K  ng (International Committee of the Red Cross): The United Nations has just granted the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies the status of observer in the General Assembly. As founder of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which was granted observer status four years ago, warmly welcomes this decision, which pays tribute to the humanitarian activities carried out by the Federation over the past 75 years.

Since its creation at the time of the Paris Peace Conference following the First World War, the Federation has steadily developed its assistance to victims of natural and technological disasters as well as to refugees and other civilians outside conflict areas. It has also invested great efforts in developing national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, whose humanitarian network covers practically all countries in the world today. Its new status will strengthen the relationship and cooperation between the Federation and the entire United Nations system and will allow the Federation to be, within the General Assembly, an advocate for the victims of natural disasters, epidemics, hunger, poverty and underdevelopment — in short, the most needy and vulnerable.

For its part, the International Committee of the Red Cross will continue to plead for the victims of armed conflicts and internal strife, in accordance with the mandate received from the international community, in particular through the Geneva Conventions. We wish to take this opportunity to thank the General Assembly for its continued support and for recognizing the separate but complementary mandates of the Federation and the ICRC.

The President (*interpretation from French*): May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 152?

It was so decided.

Statement by the President

The President (*interpretation from French*): When this morning's meeting was called to order eight out of 184 delegations were represented in the Hall; this afternoon when we began at 3.10 p.m. there were 46 representatives present. Tomorrow morning's meeting will begin at 10 a.m. Many speakers are scheduled to speak and I hope that representatives will be in their places at 10 o'clock.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.